





227/14

SERMONS

PREACHED ON

Several Occasions:

WITH TWO

DISCOURSES

OF

CONSCIENCE.

By the most Reverend Father in God,
Dr. *JOHN SHARP*,
Late Lord Archbishop of *York*.

VOL. II.

The Third EDITION.



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SER.

S E R M O N I.

Preach'd before the

House of Commons,

A T

St. Margaret's Westminster,

On the 11th of *April*, 1679.

Rev. ii. 5.

—*I will come unto thee quickly,
and will remove thy Candlestick out
of his Place, except thou repent.*

WE are this Day met together to humble ourselves for our Sins before God, and to implore his Mercy to this Nation, in the Preserving our *King*, our *Laws*, our *Religion*, and our *Lives*, and

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in

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in blessing the present publick Counsels, in order thereunto.

And never was a Work of this Nature more seasonable or more necessary than at this Time, and to us of this Kingdom: For as our *Sins* were never greater, never cried louder to Heaven for Vengeance, so the *Judgments* they deserve did never more visibly threaten us than they do at this Day: Infomuch, that if our Circumstances be duly considered, we may have just Reason to apprehend, that our Saviour in the way of his *Providence* does now speak to his *People* and *Church* of *England*, the same Words that he ordered St. *John*, by the way of *Letter*, to speak to the *Church* of *Ephesus*: *Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first Works, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy Candlestick out of his Place, except thou repent.*

This Church of *Ephesus*, as also the other fix Churches of *Asia*, to each of which St. *John*, by the Command of our Saviour, doth here address a severall Epistle, were at the Time when these Letters were dictated, very flourishing Churches, favoured as much with the especial Presence and Influence of *Christ*, as ever any Churches were.

This appears from the Preface to this Epistle in the first Verse of this Chapter, wherein *Christ*, the Author of the Epistle, is described, as *holding the Seven Stars in his right*

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right Hand, and walking in the midst of the Seven Golden Candlesticks.

The *Seven Stars* are the *Angels* of the *Se-* Cap. 1. 20.
ven Churches, as he himself interprets them; that is, according to the Sense of all Antiquity, the *Bishops*, the *Presidents*, the *Governors* of those Churches. His *holding them in his Hand*, is his supporting and directing them for the Good of the People. The *Seven Golden Candlesticks* in the midst of Ibid. which he walked, are, as he himself likewise expounds them, the *Seven Churches* themselves, as being the Places where those *Stars*, those *Lights* did shine. And his *walking among those Candlesticks* is his Presence in those Churches, Encouraging or Reproving, Rewarding or Punishing the Members of them, as there was Cause, having the Power in his Hands, either to continue those Lights among them, or to remove them to another Place.

I insist on the Explication of this Passage, because it lets us *into* the Meaning of the Phrase that we meet with in the Text, of *removing the Candlestick out of its Place*, which from hence we plainly see to be the *Unchurching* any People, the withdrawing the Light of the Gospel from them.

Well, but this Church of *Ephesus*, to which the Epistle I am now concerned in, was written, how much soever *Christ* had done for them, had, it seems, made but a

Cap. ii. 2, bad Requital of his Kindnesses. At first
3. indeed they had walked very worthily, and
are much commended by our Saviour, for
their *Zeal* and *Piety* and *Labour* in *Reli-*
gion; but now they were fallen to a great
Degree of Negligence and Remissness.

It is true, they at this Time continued
Orthodox in their *Doctrines* and *Opinions*,
they did both know and profess the true
Religion, and were zealous against false
Doctrines; which also our Saviour takes
Ver. 6. notice of and commends them for, *This*,
saith he, *thou hast, That thou hatest the Deeds*
of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate; but yet
notwithstanding, so offended was he with
the *Loss of their first Love*, the Decay of *De-*
votion and *Charity* among them, that he
threatens them solemnly in the Text, *That*
if they did not repent, and do the first Works, he
would remove their Candlestick out of its place;
that is, as I said, he would withdraw from
them his *Presence* and the *Light* of his *Gospel*.

This is a brief Account of my Text, as to
the first Design and literal Meaning of it,
that is, as it concerns the Church of *Eph-*
esus. I now desire leave to make such Ap-
plication of it to ourselves, as may be sub-
servient to the Ends designed in the Solem-
nity of this Day.

And we have warrant enough to make
such an *Application*; for let us not flatter
ourselves, what is here *Reproved*, and what
is

is here *Threatened*, hath not such a peculiar Respect to the particular Church of *Ephesus*, but that it doth equally concern all Churches so far as they fall under the same Character. Which whether we at this Day do or no, it is fit we should seriously examine ourselves about.

Here are Three Things considerable in the Text. *First*, A great *Sin*, and *Guilt* supposed. *Secondly*, A great *Judgment* denounced for that *Guilt*, no less than the *Un-churching* of that People that had contracted it. *Thirdly*, The Means prescribed for the averting that Judgment, *viz. Repentance*.

My Application of the Text shall proceed upon the same Heads, that is,

I. I shall *first* desire leave to enquire, whether we of this Nation, at this Day, for our manifold *Sins* and *Guilt* may not be judged to be in as bad or worse Circumstances than the Church of *Ephesus* in the Text, and consequently have not just Reason to fear the same *Judgment* that they are here threatened with.

II. *Secondly*, I shall consider the *Judgment* here threatened, how grievous a one it is, and consequently how great an Argument the Consideration of it ought to be to us all to *Repent*.

III. *Thirdly*, I shall speak something of this *Repentance*, how it ought to be expressed, if we would thereby prevent the *Judgment*.

I. I begin with the first of these Points which concerns our *Sin* and our *Guilt*, to make some Representation of the *Spiritual Maladies* and Diseases that this Nation groans under, those *publick Grievances*, by which the Holy Spirit of God is provoked to withdraw himself from us, and to give us up to the Power and Dominion of other Masters.

This, I must confess, is a very melancholy and unpleasing Argument, but yet very necessary to be insisted on, and that very freely too: Especially upon such an Occasion as this; and most of all, when I speak to those, whose Concernment, and whose Care it is to inspect these Matters, and from whom we hope for a Cure of our Distempers.

It is here taken Notice of the Church of *Ephesus*, to her Commendation, that she retained the Truth of the *Christian Doctrine* in Opposition to the *Heresies* of those Times; and this, God be thanked, may be spoke of us at this Day. We are not much degenerated from the Purity of Christianity as to Doctrinals. Our Church may vie with all the Churches in the World, for Orthodoxy and Conformity to the Primitive Church in Matters of Faith.

And, blessed be God's Name, this Light is not put under a Bushel. There is perhaps no Church since the Apostles Time, wherein the *Divine Truth* hath been more publickly and more purely taught, or the *Sacraments* more rightly and duly administered

sted than among us, and no Church wherein *Knowledge* has more abounded among all the Members of it, than it does now in Ours.

But the Thing that is charged upon the Church of *Ephesus*, is their Corruption in Manners; and this is the Point we are now concerned in, and which it is fit the whole Nation should examine themselves upon, and deeply lay to Heart.

Though we still keep up the *Form* of *Godliness*, yet have we not in a great Measure lost the *Power* thereof? Though the Principles which our Church *Owneth* and *Professeth* be excellently good; yet do not many of us horribly contradict them in our *Practices*? Is there not a visible Decay of Christian Piety to be observed among us, and a Deluge of Vice and Wickedness of all Sorts overspreading the Face of the Land?

I speak not here of the Faults of this or the other particular Person, for we know there was never any Age, nor any Religion that was free from such; but I speak of the National Sins, the reigning Vices of the Times, the Miscarriages that are so prevailing and so common, that a publick Guilt is contracted by them, and the whole People may justly share in the Punishment of them.

I must confess, to speak strictly, the Degrees and Proportions, in which any Age grows better or worse than those that went

before it, are not easily to be measured, unless we could live the space of several Ages, and out of our own Experience make Observations and Remarks upon them. All that we have to make our Estimate by, is the Histories and Records that are left us of the State of former Ages, with which we may compare our own; but yet this way is often very fallacious, because it is the common Humour and Custom of Men, even of those that transmit the Memoirs of their own Times to Posterity, still to complain of their own Times most, and to prefer the former Ages before that in which they live.

Upon this Consideration I shall not be forward to draw a Comparison between the former Times and ours, in order to the shewing how much greater our *Sins* are than of those that went before us, and consequently how much riper we are now for *Judgment*.

Most certain it is, that God, as he has done to the Sea, so has he to every Nation, *set its Bounds of Wickedness, beyond which they shall not pass*; and when their Iniquities are at full, he will not fail to repay Vengeance into their Bosom, The *Canaanites*, the *Jews*, and many other Nations I might name, have been sad Instances of this kind of proceeding.

But when a Nation is come to that fatal Period, none knows but God; and whether

we

we are not already very near it, we cannot tell, but we ought infinitely to fear.

Too evident it is, that Things are in a very bad Posture among us, and our Sins are grown to that height, that it is a Miracle of the divine Patience and Long-suffering that we are not already consumed. Let us be more particular.

If the prevailing of *Atheism* in a Land, and the Contempt of God and Religion:

If open *Lewdness* and *Debauchery*, and *Immorality* of all Kinds:

If the turning *Religion* into a meer Piece of *Formality*, and *outward Profession*:

If *Schisms* and *Divisions* and *Factions* in a Church:

And lastly, If our general *Unthankfulness* for, and *Unprofitableness* under the Means of Grace, and the many Mercies and Privileges that have been vouchsafed us:

If any or all of these Sins can provoke God to forsake a Nation and give it up to ruin (and yet these Sins are both in the Scripture, and by the ordinary Course of God's Providence especially mark'd out for such) then are we of this Nation at this Time in a very deplorable Condition, and are to expect Judgment without Mercy, unless it be prevented by a speedy Reformation.

For first of all, Was there ever more *Atheism* and *Irreligion* in a *Christian Nation*, at least in a *Protestant Christian Nation*; or
more

more Countenance given to such *Doctrines* and *Opinions* as directly tend thereto, than now among us?

There are not many, perhaps, that dare in exprefs Terms affirm, *That there is no God*, because they know it is not safe so to do; but many affirm it by Consequence, by asserting such Principles, from whence it must necessarily be concluded.

For what is the Consequence of such *Doctrines* as these; That there is nothing but *Body* in the World, and that the very Notion of a *Spiritual Incorporeal* Being implies a Contradiction; That there is nothing *Just* or *Unjust*, *Virtuous* or *Vicious* in itself, but as it is made so by the Laws of the Kingdom; That all Things come to pass by a *fatal Necessity*, and that no Man is so free an *Agent* as to be capable of Rewards and Punishments for his Actions: What is the Result of these *Doctrines*, but the necessary introducing of *Atheism*, and the banishing *Religion* from among Men? It being upon these Principles, not only a needless, impertinent, but an absurd contradictory Thing.

And yet are not these the avowed Principles of too many among us, and those too that are the great Pretenders to *Reason* and *Philosophy*?

But what has been the Effects of such *Philosophy*? Why suitable enough to the Notions of it. You may meet with those that make no scruple to scoff at God and every

every thing that relates to the other World, and to turn into *Ridicule* every Thing that is Sacred. And he is accounted the *Great Spirit* that *thinks* freely, and dares *speak* boldly what he *thinks*. And if a Man will set up for a *Wit*, he cannot take a more effectual Course to gain him that Reputation in many Companies, than to be confident and peremptory in contradicting the common Sentiments of Men as to *Religion*, to be able to *Burlesque* the Scriptures humorously, to be dexterous in employing Religious Phrases to Scurrilous Purposes, and to Baffle and Droll out of Countenance those that stand up for the Reputation of Sacred Things.

As the World goes, it is a piece of *Virtue* to believe a God and Providence, and future Rewards and Punishments, with the other Principles of Natural Religion; they do very well that go thus far. But as for *Instituted Revealed Religion*; for Instance, *Christianity*, how many are there that think themselves no way concerned in it, but hold it in the same Rank with *Judaism* and *Mahometanism*? And if they profess *that* rather than either of *these*, it is only because they were Born and Bred up in it; it is the *Religion* of the *Country* where they live; but if either of the other should be set up in the Place of it, they would as willingly conform to that.

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One would think that such Men as these should not be found in a *Country* that calls itself *Christian*, much less in a *Christian Country* that calls itself *Reformed*; and yet such is the *Infelicity* and the *Fault* of ours, that Men of these Principles and Practices do abound among us. O Blessed God! Whither shall we come at last, if timely Care be not taken of these Things?

But *Secondly*, If to the *Atheism* and *Infidelity* that Reigns among us, we add the open *Profaneness* and *Debauchery* that is every where to be observed in our Days, how much blacker will our Guilt appear?

Where is that Ancient *Seriousness*, and *Reservedness* and *Modesty*, that heretofore has been thought not only Essential to the *Spirit* of a *Christian*, but *Natural* to the *Temper* of an *Englishman*?

Alas! We seem to have changed not only our *Religion*, but our *Climate* too: And may for Dissoluteness and Luxury, for Pride, and Vanity, and Idleness, compare with the Ancient *Asiatics*, and do perhaps out-strip several of our present Neighbour Nations, though of a worse Religion.

But this is not all: So much are we degenerated from the Ancient Strictness of Christianity, that those Things that would not have been named among the first Christians, without Horror, and Banishing out

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out of their Society all those that did them, are frequently practised among us. And those Vices that even in the worst Times of Christianity, the Actors were afraid or ashamed to own, are now made a Matter of Sport and Merriment, a *Trick of Youth*, a *Humour*, or a *Frolick*. What was then a Deed of Darkness, is now too often done in the Face of the Sun; and the Persons concerned in the Wickedness, are so far from blushing at their Guilt, that they relate their own Actions as a pleasant Entertainment for their Company.

O the Riots and Drunkenness; the Frauds and Couzenage; the Filthy and Lewd Speeches; the Whoredoms and Adulteries; the Blasphemous Oaths and Imprecations that are daily, without any Regret, any Sense of Shame, practised among us!

We seem to have lost not only the Virtue of *Modesty*, but of *Hypocrisy* too (if so *bad* a Thing may be called by so *good* a Name.) Those Vices and Lewdnesses, which heretofore sought Corners, and wore a Mask, do now appear with a naked Face.

It is true, it is to be hoped, that the greatest Part of us are not guilty of such Crimes and Immoralities as we speak of: But this does not wholly excuse us; for we are all faulty in this, that these kind of
Vices

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Vices are not sufficiently branded and put out of Countenance. They pass under *Easy*, not to say *Creditable* Names. And so little a Sense have we of them, that a Man may keep his Reputation among us, though he be never so Vicious, supposing that his Vices be of the Mode of the Country. This very Thing, without our Personal Guilt, makes the *Sin* a *National Sin*; and God will Visit these Things upon us, except we repent.

But to make up the Measure of our Iniquities, we can in the *Third* Place live after this dissolute Rate, and yet at the same Time many of us think ourselves *Religious*: We increase the Guilt of our *Profaneness*, by joining *Formality* with it.

If we would disclaim all Religion, when we led such wretched, careless, and sensual Lives, it would, in some Respects, be more tolerable: For then Christianity would not suffer by us, it would get no *Odium*, no Ignominy in the World, it would not be an Occasion to Men to turn Atheists.

But to live *Unchristian* Lives, and yet to call ourselves *Christians*; nay, to make our *Religion* a Sanctuary for our *Vices*, and to think that we may the more freely indulge ourselves in them, because we are of the right Religion; this is intolerable, and extremely aggravates the Iniquity of
our

our Practices. And yet this is a Fault that we of this Nation are notoriously guilty of.

We often make Religion to consist in Opinion, and outward Profession. If we have but once joined ourselves to that Party of Christians which we think is the Right, and do espouse all their *Controversies*, and are Zealous in the Observance of their particular *Forms* and *Rites*, whereby they are distinguished from the other *Sects* that are in Being among us, we think we are true *Saints*, let our Morals be what they will.

This is the *Religion* that is every where too much in *Fashion*. If, for Instance, I have Listed myself a Member of some *Church* of the *Separation* (as there is great Variety of them) if I be but true to the Principles of my *Church*, and vigorous in opposing those that are not of my Way; and constant in my Attendance upon the *Brethren* at their *Assemblies*; this Zeal of mine will excuse a Multitude of my other Failings: And though I now and then use indirect Ways of Dealing in my Calling; though I be Uncharitable and Censorious; though I affront Authority, and live in a constant Disobedience and Contempt of the Laws of it, yet my Fervour for that which I take to be the *True Religion*, and the Relation I stand in to the *People of God*, will bear me out as to these Matters.

On

On the other Side, If I be a Member of the *Church of England*, I am too often apt to think myself in a fair Way to Heaven, if I be but *Stout* for the *Church*, and *Zealous* against the *Seċtaries*, and Punctual in observing the *Ceremonies* of the *Liturgy*, and now and then come to the *Sacrament*; though it may be I have nothing of the true *Life* and *Spirit* of Christianity in me, nothing of that Sobriety, and Meekness, and Charity, and inward Devotion that our Saviour doth indispenſably require of all his Followers.

Nay, ſo far from that, it may be I think it is no matter how I live, if I be but a good *Subject* to the *King*, and a true *Son* of the *Church*. Nay, it is well if I don't go farther; it is well if I don't make *Vice* and *Debauchery* an eſſential Character of a Man that is right in his Principles; it is well if I don't brand Seriousneſs of Converſation, and a Care of one's Words and Actions, with the Name of *Fanaticism*, and reproach every one as a *Puritan*, that will not Swear and Drink, and take thoſe Unchristian Liberties that I do.

You know there are ſuch Men as theſe frequently to be found in all the ſeveral *Seċts* and *Ways* of *Religion* among us. But, O! What is become of Christianity all the while?

This

This sure cannot be thy Religion, O Blessed *Jesus*! since it is so unlike both thy Actions and thy Doctrines: Thou never placedst any Virtue or Praise in *Knowing*, but in *Doing*; in being of this or the other particular External *Mode of Religion*; but in *believing* thy *Gospel*, and *following* thy *Example*, in mortifying our Lusts, and leading a Life of Peaceableness, and Obedience, and Humility, and all manner of inward Holiness and Purity.

How our Brethren of the *Separation* will dispose of their Members that are of this Temper, I know not; but as to all those that pretend to be of our Communion, and yet live scandalous Lives, and think that their owning themselves for the *Sons of the Church*, will make Atonement for their Immoralities, it is to be feared they have done us more hurt than ever they will do us good. And unless they would reform, it may perhaps be wished that we were rid of them: Let them declare themselves *Fanaticks*, *Papists*, any Thing, rather than Members of the *Church of England*.

And though by their Recession, and going over to the Enemies Camp, we might possibly be so weakened, that we could not support ourselves, but must be forced to fall under our Adversaries; yet I do not know whether even then the

Church would not be the better for it. And, it would perhaps be more desirable to live in a mean, low, afflicted Condition, without such Company, than to govern the World with it.

But *Fourthly*, These are not all the Maladies which this distressed *Church* and *Nation* labours under: There is another Wound that is as wide, and bleeds as much as any of the rest: And which, if timely Care be not taken of it, may cause her Expiration as soon as any other.

I mean the Unnatural, Unchristian *Feuds* and *Divisions* that are amongst us, our Nations being rent and torn into so many *Parties* and *Factions*, and the cruel and bitter *Animosities* with which each Party does prosecute the other. And all this, if Men would consider, for little Things, in comparison, Things certainly not worth all this Heat, Things that the Wisest and Best of the several dissenting Parties confess to be indifferent.

O! How do Men, by their foolish and unaccountable Divisions, weaken the common Interest that all pretend at least to be concerned for! What Advantages are hereby given to the Adversaries!

It is likely, indeed, that as they first set on Foot, so they still continue to foment their Differences. They laugh at this Opportunity of making Profelytes to their Religion:

ligion: and a plentiful Harvest they have hereby reaped to themselves.

But where is our Wisdom in the mean Time? Have Men no more Understanding, than to be still hot and eager in their Contentions about a Shadow, when there is an Enemy at the Gate, that is in a fair Way to take from us the *Substance*?

Some indeed, may be apt to dispute which Side ought to comply; Whether the *Dissenters* ought to come over to the *Established Church*, or the Church to them? It is not now a Time fully to debate the Merits of that Cause. But this may be truly said, If Men would be honest and sincere, and mix no Passion or worldly Concernment with their Religion, the Point would soon be decided on the Church's side.

Every Man that calls himself a *Protestant*, would think himself obliged to obey Lawful Authority in all Things, where he was convinced their Commands were not Unlawful. And if he could not, with a safe Conscience, come up to it in *all Things*, he would come up as far as he could. And as for those Things that he was not satisfied about, as he would not condemn or censure those that were persuaded, or practised otherwise, so neither would he raise any Disturbance in the

C 2

Church,

The First Sermon.

Church, by joining himself to an opposite Party.

And on the other Side, those that did Conform to the Church in *all Things*, would not withdraw their Charity from their Fellow *Christians*, for not doing so much as they. Though they differed from them in several Opinions, yet they would join Hands with them in all Christian Offices of mutual *Love* and *Charity*, and in a joint Opposition of the *Common Enemy*.

But alas! Things are not thus with us; and I note it as a Fault, for which we ought deeply to be affected this Day; and if Men did duly weigh the *Sinfulness* and the *Danger* that all *Schisms* and *Separations* of this kind do bring upon a Nation, they would be thus affected.

If human Conjectures about the Reasons and Causes of divine Judgments may be allowed, it will appear from History and Experience, that there has been as much War and Bloodshed caused in the World, as many Nations Desolated, as many Churches Ruined by the Malignity and evil Influence of this *Sin* of *Schism*, as any other.

And if ever God in Judgment shall think fit to give over this flourishing Church of ours, as a Prey to that mighty Hunter, that would erect an Universal *Spiritual Monarchy*

chy to himself upon the Ruins of all the particular *Churches of Christendom*, we should have good Reason to believe, that the unnecessary *Divisions* and *Quarrels* among ourselves had a great Hand in bringing on the *Judgment*.

In all Appearance, we of this Nation might be impregnable as to our *Religion*, if those Protestants among us, who have been so long separated from the Communion of our National Church, would once return into its Bosom; that we might all heartily join together in *Loving* and *Assisting* one another, and *Opposing* the publick *Adversary*,

But *Fifthly* and *Lastly*, If the State of our *Church* and *Nation* was not near so bad as I have now represented it, yet there is another Thing still, that *all*, even the *best* of us, have reason to be sensible of, and to mourn for; as that, which of itself is sufficient to bring Destruction upon us. And that is, our *Ingratitude* to God for his many *Mercies* and *Deliverances*, and our *Unprofitableness* under those *Means* of *Grace* that he has been pleased so long to afford us.

I cannot call this a particular *Sin*, it is, if you will, an *Aggravation* of all the rest, or *all* of them summed up together. However, I give it a particular Consideration, because it is a Thing that God has set a

Mark upon, and has so far declared his Displeasure against it, that he has determined it a just Cause to *Unpeople* or *Unchurch* a Nation.

Luke xiii.
6.

Our Saviour tells us, that when a certain Man had planted a Fig-tree in his Vineyard, and came and sought Fruit thereon, and found none, he said unto the Dresser of his Vineyard, *Behold these three Years I come, seeking Fruit on this Fig-tree, and find none; cut it down, why doth it cumber the Ground?*

Let us apply this Parable to ourselves, as certainly the Reason of it will sufficiently prompt us. Was ever *Fig-tree* or *Vineyard* more curiously Planted, more carefully Drest, more richly Manured, more securely Fenced from the Outrages of Beasts of Prey, than our *Fig-tree*, our *Vineyard*, the *Church* of *England*? For of a Church this Parable is necessarily to be understood.

Is there any one of the *Protestant Churches* in *Europe*, that has been so regularly Reformed; that in the first Constitution of it was Established upon Principles so justifiable, so agreeable with the Laws of *Nature* and *Christianity*, and the Civil Rights of the *Kingdom*, as this Church of *England* was?

Is there any *Protestant Church* in *Europe*, whose Articles of Faith, whose Discipline, whose

whose Manner and Rites of *Worship* are more correspondent to Ancient *Tradition*, and Catholick *Doctrine* and *Practice*?

Is there any *Protestant Church* in *Europe*, wherein the Word of God has been taught more sincerely, and more to the Edification of the People, than among us?

Is there any *Protestant Church*, that has more comfortably lived under their own *Vines*, and their own *Fig-trees*, has more freely enjoyed all the Benefits and Privileges that either *Religion* or their *Birth-right* could intitle them to, than we have done?

Is there any *Protestant Church*, that has been preserved so miraculously, that hath received so many wonderful Deliverances from Enemies of all Sorts? Enemies of the *Hills* and of the *Vallies*? And yet notwithstanding all; notwithstanding the Contrivances of *false Brethren* within ourselves, and the Assaults of the *Publick Adversaries* Abroad, does still not only continue in Being, but Flourisheth also, as God be thanked, we do at this Day?

The Care that God hath taken of this Nation hath been wonderful: His Providences towards us are to be admired for the Rareness and the Graciousness of them. And therefore justly may the Lord of the Vineyard, after all this Care, all these Providences, expect some Good Fruit from us, proportion-

able to his Kindness to us. And long has he waited for it.

But what Fruits have we produced after all these great Opportunities, and this great Patience? Can we really say that we are now *Better* than our *Fore-fathers* of the Reformation, who, perhaps, had not more Light, certainly had not that Experience of God's Mercies and Deliverances that we have? I am afraid our Hearts will give it against us.

Can we say that we are not worse than they? That we have, at least, made as good an Use and Improvement of the Talents that have been committed to us, as they did? It is to be feared we shall be cast upon this Point also.

Our own Experience will tell us, if we have lived any considerable Time in the World, that even since our Remembrance, though God hath more and more both heap'd his *Favours* and his *Severities* upon us, yet we have grown worse and worse.

His Mercies have not melted us; his Judgments have not reclaimed us; he hath done all that is possible, both by *Gentle* and *Severe* Methods, to bring us to a Sense of our Duty; but we, like the *Deaf Adder*, have *stopped our Ears*, and have not hearkened to the *Voice of the Charmer*, though he charmed never so wisely.

What therefore, these things considered, can we expect, but that God should pass the same

same Sentence upon this unthankful, this irreclaimable People of *England*, that the Lord of the *Vineyard* passed upon the *Fig-tree* in the Parable, *Cut it down, why doth it cumber the Ground?*

Or, if you will take it in the Words of the Prophet, what should hinder, or what can we expect, but that God should speak to us (that is, decree upon us) what he did to his beloved People, in the 5th of *Isaiah's* Prophecy, *O Inhabitants of Jerusalem, and Men of Judah, Judge, I pray you, between me and my Vineyard. What could I have done more to my Vineyard, that I have not done in it? Wherefore then, when I looked that it should bring forth Grapes, brought it forth wild Grapes? And now go to, I will tell you what I will do with my Vineyard: I will take away the Hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the Wall thereof, and it shall be troden down; and I will lay it waste; it shall not be pruned or digged, but there shall come up Briers and Thorns.*

II. This is the *Judgment* that is here threatened in the Text, which I now come, in the *Second Place*, more particularly to consider.

A grievous Judgment without doubt it is, and the greatest that can fall upon any Nation: For so much as our *Souls* are of greater Concernment to us than our *Bodies*, so much are *Spiritual Mercies* to be preferred before
Temporals:

Temporal: And so much the greater misery is it for any People to be deprived of them, than of the other.

For that Nation, which was once God's own peculiar People, to be abandoned by him, and to be laid in common with the rest of the World that are under the *Prince of the Power of the Air*; for that Nation, that once enjoyed the Influences of God's Presence, and the Light of the Truth, and the Benefits of his Ordinances, now to be stript of all these; to be without God, without Light, without the ordinary Means of saving their Souls: O what more deplorable Condition can be imagined!

And yet thus severe hath God been with many Nations: Thus when their Sins have cried aloud, and the Sinners have been impudent, and all Methods of Amendment have been ineffectual, God hath in Anger remov'd *their Candlestick* from among them.

The Church of *Ephesus* which *Christ* thus threatens in the Text, nay, all the other six Churches of *Asia*, to which the Epistles are sent, are sad Instances of this. Once most flourishing Churches they were, even the very Paradise of the Lord; but now they lie waste and desolate, overrun with Ignorance and Barbarity and *Mahometanism*.

That *Africa*, which is not now more fruitful of Monsters, than it was once of excellently wise and learned Men; that *Africa*, which

which formerly afforded us our *Clemens*, our *Origen*, our *Tertullian*, our *Cyprian*, our *Augustine*, and many other extraordinary Lights in the Church of God; that famous *Africa*, in whose Soil Christianity did thrive so prodigiously, and could boast of so many flourishing Churches, alas! is now a Wilderness. *The wild Boars have broken into the Vineyard and eaten it up, and it brings forth nothing but Briers and Thorns: To use the Words of the Prophet.*

And who knows but God may suddenly make this Church and Nation, this our *England*, which, *Jeshurun* like, is *waxed fat and grown proud, and has kicked against God*, such another Example of the Vengeance of this kind?

It is true, in all appearance there is no Danger of having our *Candlestick* removed from us in the same sense or manner that those Churches, I have instanced in, had theirs. We have no Apprehensions that either *Mahometanism* or *Paganism* will come into these Kingdoms: At least not in our Days.

It is another kind of Removal of our *Candlestick* that we have reason to fear: It is another Religion nigher at hand that is most likely to displace our *Candlestick*.

You all know what Religion I mean: it is *Popery* that most threatens us. It is that restless busy Religion that has made so much
Disturbance

Disturbance in *Christendom*; that has always been and is still so active by all Means, just or unjust, by Fraud or Force to insinuate, itself into all Places. It is this we ought to have the most Apprehensions of.

It is true, those that are of this Religion do profess the Name of *Christ*, and we do not deny them the Title of a Christian Church: But of all sorts of Christianity this seems to be the worst; and next to the being of no Church, it is the least desirable to be of this.

And for all the specious Titles of *Visible* and *Perpetual* and *Catholick* and *Infallible*, which they would amuse us with; if we did seriously consider what a kind of *Religion* we now enjoy, and what a kind of *Religion* will come into the Place of it, if ever they get their Will of us, we should sadly reflect upon the change. And for all we continued a Christian Country, yet we should lament over ourselves that our *Candlestick* was removed out of its Place.

I believe there are few here but sufficiently understand what a kind of Religion this is, and what you are to expect from it: But yet I will beg leave to give a brief Account of some of the Articles of it. Not to instruct you, but to give you occasion to consider how well it will suit with us of this Kingdom, or indeed with any that would be

be *Christians* after the way of *Christ's* Institution.

It is a Religion, whose avowed Principles are to keep their People in Ignorance as much as they can: For with them *Ignorance is the Mother of Devotion*. And if you do but blindly *believe* as the Church *believes*, and blindly *Obey* what is imposed upon you, you are good *Catholicks*.

It is a Religion, in which you will not be allowed to have any *Prayers* in *publick* that you can understand. When you come to Church, you may entertain yourselves with saying over your *Rosary* (which is a solemn Set of Prayers containing *Ten* Addresses to the *Virgin Mary* for *One* to our *Lord*) and other *private* Prayers, if you have them; but join in the *publick* Service with the Minister you cannot, unless you understand *Latin*.

It is a Religion, into which as soon as you enter, you must give up your Bibles: For the People must not read the Scripture without especial License, and not at all of that Translation you now have of it.

It is a Religion that robs you of half the Sacrament: For you must never be allowed to receive the Cup in the Lord's Supper; notwithstanding the Institution of our Lord in express Words: And notwithstanding the Practice of the Primitive Church to the contrary.

It

The First Sermon.

Bellar. de
Roman.
Pontif. lib.
4. cap. 5.

It is a Religion, in which you are so far from being permitted *to try all things and to hold to that which is good*, according to the Apostle's Command; that you must wholly submit your Reason and Understanding to the Dictates of an infallible Judge, even so far (if one of their greatest Authors say true) as to be bound to believe *Virtue* to be *Bad*, and *Vice* to be *Good*, if it shall please his Holiness to say so.

Nay, it is a Religion, in which you shall not be allowed to believe your very Senses: For though Four of your Five Senses tell you that one of the consecrated Elements in the Sacraments is a Piece of Bread, yet you are obliged, under pain of Damnation, to believe that it is not so, but the very Body of *Christ* that was crucified at *Jerusalem*, and is now in Heaven; and which, upon this Supposition, must be actually and separately present in a thousand distant Places at once every Day.

It is a Religion that will bring you back to the old *Paganish Idolatry*, or to that which is as near it as can be. For as the old Heathens had their inferior *Deities*, their *Dæmons* and *Heroes* to be Mediators between God and them; so will you have your several Saints and Patrons of the like nature, which you must apply to for the recommending your Prayers to the Divine Majesty: And as they had the *Images* of their
Gods

Gods and Mediators to worship and fall down before; so you will also, for the same purpose, have the Images of the Blessed *Trinity*, and the Virgin *Mary*, and the rest of the Saints.

It is true, the Pagans were mightily reprov'd for these things, both in the Scripture and by the Primitive Christians. And they made several Defenses and Apologies for their Practices. And the very same doth the Church of *Rome* now make for her Invocation of Saints and Image-worship. But if the one were guilty of Idolatry, there is little doubt but the others are so also: For there is not an Hair's breadth difference between the Pleas and Apologies that each Party makes for itself.

Nay, It is a Religion that will engage you in a more unnatural Idolatry than ever the Pagans were guilty of. *Cicero*, that was De Nat. Deor. l. 3. a Heathen himself, and knew as much of that Religion as any Man living did; yet affirms, that there was none so mad in any of the Religions of his Time as to pretend to eat his God: But yet this you must do in that Religion every time you receive the Sacrament: And the Priest does it every Day when he says Mass: For he eats that which himself and you all must worship. And you are taught to believe, that what you worship in the Mass is God, that is, the very
Huma-

The First Sermon.

Humanity of our Saviour united Personally to his *Divinity*.

It is true, in this Religion there are many Advantages and Conveniences pretended that you cannot really have in the Religion you now profess. But look you to them, whether they will prove so in the event.

The easy ways they have to reconcile Sinners to God, even after the most vicious Life, by the Means of the Sacrament of *Penance*, as it is commonly taught and administered in that Church; together with the liberty you may take in the choice of such a Confessor as you think will be most favourable to your Case. Add to this, the virtue of *Indulgences*, and *Masses* for the Dead. As also the Efficacy of *Pilgrimages*, *Reliques*, and *Holy Garments*, &c. for the purging of Sins.

All these things put together, may perhaps rid you of a great many Uneasinesses, and Scruples, and Pangs of Conscience, with which you might otherwise be troubled; and which would not be so easily cured in the Way that you are now in. There is little doubt but upon the commonly received Principles of that Religion, you may go to Heaven upon much easier Terms than you can upon ours: But yet for all that, in a Business of such consequence as the Salvation of a Man's Soul is, it is good to make a serious Enquiry, whether of the two Ways is the safer.

But

But there is one Thing in this Religion which will not so easily go down with *Englishmen*: And that is, that you cannot therein be any longer good Subjects to your Prince, than his Holiness will give you leave.

If His Majesty should be a *Heretick* (as it is certain his present Majesty is, in their Account) nay, in other Cases besides that of *Herejy*, the Pope has power to depose him, and absolve his Subjects from their Allegiance: And that not only in the Judgment of their most famous *Casuits*, and by the established Rules of their *Canon Law*, but by the Decree of an Infallible *General Council*: And it has been a frequent practice of the Pope to make use of his power in this way.

Nay, in this Kingdom of *England* he needs not stay for such Pretences: For his Holiness (as appears upon Record) has declared, That this Kingdom is held in Fee of the Papacy; and that whoever wears the Crown here, is their *Vassal*, and consequently may be turned out at pleasure.

What the Effects of these Doctrines have been, we of this Kingdom have had sufficient Experience since the Reformation; not to mention the Troubles they have given us in former Times. The Instances are so many and so very well known, that I need not name them: But if they were all for-

got, the *late*, shall I say? or the *present Popish Plot*, for the taking away the Life of His Sacred Majesty, and subverting the Protestant Religion, and the established Government of this Kingdom, now brought to light; this alone, though all the other Instances were worn out of Memory, would sufficiently shew us what we are to expect from these *Roman Principles*, as to the Security either of our *Prince*, or our *Liberties*, or our *Religion*.

But blessed be God's Name, that this cursed Design has been hitherto defeated; and we are here to Praise him for it, and to pray to him for a further Discovery of it.

And blessed be his Name, that he hath given us this remarkable Evidence that he has not yet abandoned us, notwithstanding our manifold Provocations. Certainly this extraordinary Providence of God towards us, is one of the most comfortable Arguments that we can draw to ourselves, that God has yet some pity for this Nation, if we will but pity ourselves.

And *lastly*, Blessed be God's Name that this Mercy has already had this good Effect upon us, that we are awakened into a more lively Sense of the manifold Iniquity and Mischief and Danger of the *Popish Religion and Party*.

What

What is now further to be desired, but that the Issue of Things among us may be suitable to these beginnings?

God has once more given this Nation a great opportunity for the establishing her tottering *Candlestick*, and who knows whether ever the like will be offered again.

It therefore infinitely concerns all of us, especially you, to whom the Managery of Publick Affairs is committed, to improve this present Opportunity to the good Purposes, for which it was given; that so this great Mercy and Providence of God be not lost upon us.

Offences may come, and we may be disappointed: But, as our Saviour said, *Wo be to that Man, by whom the Offence cometh.* Such a Man will never be able to answer it, either to God or his Country, or at last to his own Conscience.

O may God so inspire you with the Spirit of Wisdom and Counsel; with Temper and Moderation; with a Spirit so disengaged from private Ends and Interests, so unbiased by particular Faction, and so wholly intent upon the Publick Good, that you may be the blessed Instruments of healing all the Distempers we groan under; and of deriving upon us those Blessings, which we this Day pray for!

That by your Means *Atheism* and *Contempt of Religion*, as also *Lewdness* and *Debauchery*

bauchery of all kinds may be so discouraged, that they shall not dare to appear with an open Face.

That by your Means a Stop may be put to the scandalous *Schisms* and *Divisions* that are among us; that, if it be possible, we may serve God with one Heart and with one Mind.

That by your Means, not only the Person of His Sacred Majesty, and the Rights of his Crown may be secured against all wicked Attempts, whether of Papists or others; but also that upon his Head the Crown may be so supported, and so flourish, that we may at least be in a Condition not to fear the Malice or the Power of any foreign Enemy.

Lastly, That by your Means as effectual Provision as possible may be made, both for the keeping out that *foreign Religion*, which, as we have seen, so little serves the Ends of Christianity, and so much deserves the Interest both of King and People: And for the more firm Establishment of the *Protestant Religion* of the Church of *England*; that so our present *Candlestick* may be continued to our Posterity, and they as well as we may have reason to bless God for you.

III. But in order to the procuring those great Blessings to the Kingdom, there is a Duty necessary to be performed by all of us in
our

our *private* Capacities, which is here specified in the Text, *viz. Repentance*. *I will come unto thee quickly*, says our Saviour, *and will remove thy Candlestick out of its Place, except thou repent*. Which *Repentance*, how it ought to be performed by us, is the *Third* and *Last* Thing I am to speak to.

But because I would not exceed the ordinary Limits of a Sermon, I shall only mention the Heads of those Things which upon this Occasion are proper to be insisted on.

If we would repent sincerely of our Sins, so as to do our Parts towards the Prevention of those *Judgments* that hang over our Heads, and the procuring those *Blessings* we stand in need of; it will be necessary that every one of us do deeply humble and afflict our Souls before God for our *own Sins*, the Sins which we have in Person committed, devoutly confessing them, and begging of God, that when he makes Inquisition for a *National* Guilt, he would not remember them, nor let the Publick suffer any thing upon our Account.

It is also necessary that we be duly sensible of the *common Sins* of others, so as to repent of them also: Lamenting before God the Corruptions of the Times; the publick fashionable Vices of the Age. This was the Spirit of *David*, who was concerned for the Faults of others as well as his own:

Rivers of Tears, saith he, run down my Eyes because Men keep not thy Law.

Nay further, in order to a *National Repentance*, we are obliged to confess to God the *Sins* of our *Forefathers*, and pray for the Forgiveness of them also. What my own former *private Sins* are to me at present with respect to my *Personal Capacity*; the same are the *Sins* of our *Fathers* to us all, considered as a Nation or People, who are to repent as well of the past as of the present *Sins* of the Land. This is the Rule that God himself hath prescribed for a *publick Repentance*. And for not putting that Rule in practice, the People of the *Jews*, in our Saviour's Time, severely suffered: For upon the *Men of that Generation* (as our

Mat. xxiii. 35. Saviour had threatened) *was revenged all the righteous Bloodshed in the Land, from the Blood of Abel, to the Blood of Zachariah*, though yet none of that Blood was shed by that Generation. Great Reason therefore have we at this Day seriously to put up to God that Petition which we so often repeat in our *Litany*, *Remember not, Lord, our Offences, nor the Offences of our Forefathers; but spare us, good Lord, spare thy People, whom thou hast redeemed with thy most precious Blood, and be not angry with us for ever.*

But to make this *Repentance* such as it ought to be, there is further required a thorough *Change* in our *Hearts* and *Minds*;

so that as we confess and ask pardon for the Faults of our Lives, we should also amend them. Without this all our ceremonious Humiliation will signify nothing.

Nay, we must not only reform *ourselves*, but do what we can in our Spheres towards the reforming of *others*: And every one of us might do a great deal, if we would, though it was but in this one thing, in heartily discouraging *scandalous* and *open* Sins wherever we meet with them; so far as it may be done without breach of Respect to our Superiors, or forfeiture of common Prudence. If Vice had once an ill Name in the World, was once generally stigmatized with Reproach and Ignominy, it would quickly lose its Empire, and Thousands that are now the Slaves of it, would become Pro-felytes to Virtue.

But further, if we truly fear the *Judgment* I have been speaking of, and by our *Repentance* would prevent it, let us make this particular Expression of that *Repentance*, viz. Let us set a great Value upon the *Religion* we at present enjoy: Let us in all our Actions shew a great Zeal and Concernment for it, and do what we can both towards the continuing and promoting it.

If every one of us in his way would but express half that Zeal, and Industry, and Diligence in the Cause of our Religion, that
we

we see our Adversaries do, we should probably, in a very little time, see a quite different face of Things; and should not only put a Stop to their present Successes, but gain so much ground upon them, as to cast them into despair of ever making a Conquest of this Nation. But here is the Misery, we are so confident and secure of the goodness of our Cause, that we think it will support itself without any Help of ours. Let us in this Point learn Wisdom from our Enemies.

But especially, let us practise heartily those Virtues which our Religion peculiarly teaches us, as opposed to Popery. Let us be Meek, and Gentle, and Long-suffering, even to those that differ in Opinion from us. Let us hate all Tricks, and Devices, and Equivocations, both in our Words and our Carriage. Let us be constantly and inflexibly Loyal to our Prince, and let no Consideration in the World make us violate our Allegiance to him.

To all which, let us in the last Place add our earnest and constant Prayers to God, that he would be pleased to take pity of us; To avert the *Judgments* we are threatened with, and continue the *Mercies* we have hitherto enjoyed. That he would protect our *Religion*, and make it to flourish more and more. That he would preserve our *King*, our *Government*, our *Laws*: And in order thereunto,

thereunto, that he would influence and direct all the publick Councils, especially the great *Council* of the Nation now assembled in *Parliament*, that this Session of theirs may have a happy and a glorious Issue. Which God of his Mercy grant, &c.



S E R-

SERMON II.

Preached before the
LORDS Spiritual and Temporal
 in Parliament Assembled,
 IN THE
Abbey Church at Westminster,
 On the 30th of January, 1⁶⁹⁹.

Titus iii. 1.

*Put them in mind to be subject to
 Principalities and Powers, to obey
 Magistrates.*

YOU all know what kind of Argument this Day calls for: For by the Design of keeping it, the Business that the *Preacher* hath to do, is to press *Obedience* and *Subjection* to the Government we live under, and to preach against

against *Faction* and *Rebellion*. And accordingly it is prescribed in the *Rubrick* of this *Day's Service*, that if there be a *Sermon* at all, and not a *Homily*, it shall be upon this Argument.

It is very well that *Authority* hath taken care, that at some solemn Times we should *Preach* upon this Subject in a more solemn Manner: Because, though it be as needful as any, yet there are some among us that think it a very improper *Theme* for the *Pulpit*. I must confess, I had an eye to this Suggestion, when I pitched upon these Words which I have now read to you; because I think there is something to be observed in them, which will effectually confute it.

St. *Paul* here lays his Charge upon *Titus*, That he should put the People that were under his Care *in mind, to be subject to Principalities and Powers, and to obey Magistrates*.

Two Things I would here consider: *First*, The *Person* that is ordered thus to put the People *in mind*: And *Secondly*, The *Thing* that he is to put them in mind of, which is, *Subjection and Obedience to Principalities and Powers, and Magistrates*.

I begin with the first Thing, the *Person*, to whom St. *Paul* writes this *Epistle*; and to whom he gives it in Charge, That he should *put the People in mind, to be subject*.

Who

The Second Sermon.

Who was this *Person*? Why it was *Titus*, an Ecclesiastick, a Bishop, a Preacher of the Gospel; not a *Layman*, not a *Magistrate*, but a pure *Churchman*. What can be more plainly gathered from hence than this; That it is not foreign to a Clergyman's Office to preach *Obedience* and *Submission* to the Government; but, on the contrary, a Part of his Function, a necessary Duty incumbent upon him to do it. If any Man affirm otherwise, he must either say, that *St. Paul* did not rightly instruct *Titus* in his Office, but enjoined him to do that which he had nothing to do with; or he must shew, that the Case of *Titus* was different from that of the Ministers of the Gospel at this Day. Neither of which Things can, I believe, be easily made out.

And yet in such Times are we fallen, that it is taken ill by many, that Ministers should, in their Pulpit Discourses, meddle with these Matters. I must confess, I think, that of all Men, it most concerns a Minister of Religion not to be a *Busybody*, or a Medler in other Mens Matters: For, in truth, he hath work enough to do of his own; and such kind of Work too, as, let him behave himself as inoffensively as he can, will create him Difficulties and Enemies enough. And therefore it would be very imprudent in him to usurp other Mens Provinces,

Provinces, and to *burn* his *Fingers* where he needs not; especially, considering that the Success of his Labours and Endeavours among the People doth in a great Measure depend upon the good Liking they have of him.

But what is it that gives Offence? or what is it that renders this Argument we are speaking of, so improper a Subject for a Clergyman to treat of? Why, several Things are pretended, and I shall name some of them.

First, It is said, that the Work of a Clergyman, is to instruct Men in *Christ's* Religion, to preach against *Vice* and *Sin*, and to preach up *Holiness* and *good Life*, and mutual *Love* and *Charity*: But what has he to do with *State Affairs*, as Matters of Government are?

I answer, He hath nothing, indeed, to do with them: But his only Work is to make Men good *Christians*, by endeavouring to possess them with a hearty Belief of our Saviour's Doctrines and Promises, and persuading them to a Conformity in their Lives to his Precepts. This is our proper Work, and this is that we ought to attend to all the Days of our Life; and with *Government* and *State Affairs* we ought not to meddle, in our *Sermons* especially.

But

But then, after all this, it doth not follow, but that we are all bound, as we have occasion, to preach up *Loyalty* and *Obedience* to our *Governors*. For this is no *State Affair*, but an *Affair* of the *Gospel*. We cannot instruct Men in *Christ's* Religion, without instructing them in this.

If, indeed, it was an indifferent Thing to a Man's Christianity, or to his Salvation, whether he was a *good* or a *bad* Subject; then, indeed, it would be as indifferent to a Preacher, whether he insisted on these Things to the People: But it is not so.

One great Branch of Christian Holiness, as it is declared in the *New Testament*, is, That every one demean himself quietly, and peaceably, and obediently to the Government he lives under; and that not only for *Wrath*, or Fear of Punishment, but also for *Conscience-sake*. And this is made as necessary a Condition of going to Heaven, as any other particular Virtue is. And therefore, if we will instruct Men in *Christ's* Religion, and in the indispensable Points of Holiness required thereby, we must instruct them in this also.

One great *Vice* and *damnable Sin*, that the Religion of our Lord has cautioned against, is the Sin of *Factionfness* and *Rebellion*: And therefore, if it be our Duty to declare against the Sins and Vices that are contrary,

contrary to Christianity, it is our Duty to declare and caution against this also.

Lastly, We do readily grant, that a great Part of our Office consists in most affectionately recommending and pressing the Necessity of *mutual Love and Charity*. But if this be necessary, is it not more so, to recommend and press *Obedience to Authority*, without which *mutual Love and Charity* cannot possibly subsist, that being the common Ligament of them; and, take away that, we should be no better than *Bears and Tygers* one to another?

But it is said, in the *Second Place*, That Preachers ought not to meddle with these Points, because they are not competent Judges of them: They do not know the Measures and Limits of *Loyalty* and *Disloyalty*, of being a *good*, and a *bad* Subject: These depending altogether upon the Constitution of the Government we live under; and the determining of them belongs to the *Civil Courts*, and not to their Profession.

To this I answer, That in all those Instances, wherein this Argument falls under the Cognizance and Determination of *Parliaments*, or *Judges*, or *Lawyers*, we do not pretend to meddle with it: And if any Man do, let him answer for himself. All that we pretend to, is to press the plain, general, indispensable Duties of *Obedience to Laws*, and of *Peaceableness* and *Subjection to the higher Powers*,

The Second Sermon.

Powers, which *Christ* and his Apostles have every where taught in the Bible.

If, indeed, a Preacher should in the Pulpit presume to give his Judgment about the Management of publick Affairs; or to lay down Doctrines, as from *Christ*, about the Forms and Models of Kingdoms or Commonwealths; or to adjust the Limits of the *Prerogative* of the Prince, or of the *Liberties* of the Subject in our present Government: I say, if a Divine should meddle with such Matters as these in his Sermons, I do not know how he can be excused from the just Censure of meddling with Things that nothing concern him. This is, indeed, a *practising* in *State Matters*, and is usurping an Office that belongs to another *Profession*, and to Men of another *Character*. And I should account it every whit as indecent in a Clergyman to take upon him to deal in these Points, as it would be for him to determine *Titles* of *Land* in the *Pulpit*, which are in dispute in *Westminster Hall*.

But what is this to the Preaching *Obedience* and *Subjection* to the established Government? Let meddling with Politicks be as odious as you please in a Clergyman, yet sure it must not only be allowed to him, but be thought his Duty to exhort all Subjects to be faithful to their Prince, to live peaceably under his Government,
and

and to obey all the Laws that are made by just Authority; and even where they cannot obey them, yet to submit, and to raise no Disturbance to the Publick upon that Account. And this is the great Thing which we say Clergymen have to do in this Matter.

We meddle not with *Politics*; we meddle not with *Prerogative* or *Property*; we meddle not with the Disputes and Controversies of Law that may arise about these Matters; but we preach a Company of plain Lessons of *Peaceableness*, and *Fidelity*, and *Submission* to our *Rulers*; such as the Law of Nature teaches, such as both *Christ* and his Apostles did preach in all Places wherever they came; and such as will at this Day hold in all the Governments of the World, whether they be *Kingdoms* or *Common-wealths*.

And if at any time we make a particular Application of these general Rules to our own Established Government, it is only in such Instances as are plainly of the Essence of our *National* Constitution; in such Instances as are plainly contained in the *Oaths* of *Allegiance* and *Supremacy*, and those other *Tests*, which, for the Security of the Government, the Law hath taken care that Subjects shall Swear to, and consequently must be thought obliged both to understand and practise them. And how can it be an

Invasion of another Man's Office, to preach and insist upon such Things as these? No, certainly, what is the Duty of every Subject both to understand and practise in order to his Salvation, *that*, without doubt, it is the Duty of their Pastors to put them in mind of.

But, *Thirdly*, It is said further, That Preachers cannot engage in these Arguments, but they will of necessity side with some *Party* or *Faction* among us: Now they should have nothing to do with *Parties* or *Factions*.

To this I answer, That to be on the Side of the Established Government, and to endeavour to maintain that, is not to be a Favourer of *Parties* and *Factions*: But they are the *Factions*, they are the Setters up, or Abettors of *Parties*, who endeavour to destroy, or unsettle, or disparage, or in the least to hurt and weaken the Government, and the Laws, as they are established, let the Principles upon which they go, or the Pretences they make, be what they will, So that a Minister, by preaching *Obedience* and *Subjection*, doth not, in the least, make himself of any *Party*; but, on the contrary, he sets himself against all *Parties*: And so he ought to do; for his Business is, to be on the Side of the Government, as it is by Law established; and as vigorously as in him lies, in such Ways as are proper for his

his Function, to oppose all those that would either secretly undermine it, or openly assault it: In a Word, all those that would make any Change or Innovation in it (by whatever Names they are discriminated) by any other Means or Methods, than what the Law of the Land, and the Nature of the Constitution doth allow.

And thus much of the *First Thing* I took notice of in the Text, *viz.* the *Person*, to whom the Charge is here given, That *he should put the People in Mind*. I now come, in the *Second Place*, to the *Thing* he was to put them in Mind of; and that is, *to be subject to Principalities and Powers, and to obey Magistrates*.

And here *Two Things* are to be enquired into; *First*, Who are those *Principalities*, and *Powers*, and *Magistrates*, to whom we are to be *subject*, and whom we are to *obey*. And *Secondly*, Wherein consists that *Subjection* and *Obedience* that we are to give them.

As for the *First* of these, Who are the *Principalities*, and *Powers*, and *Magistrates*? Why, certainly, by these Words are meant the *Supreme Civil Governors* of every Nation; and under them their *subordinate Officers*. Let the Form of Government, in any Country, be what it will; in whomsoever the *Sovereign Authority* is lodged (whether in one or in many) they are the

The Second Sermon.

Principalities and Powers, to whom we are to be *subject*; and those that are commisioned and deputed to exercise Authority under them, are the *Magistrates*, whom we are to *obey*.

St. *Peter*, in the second Chapter of his First Epistle, doth thus express them (aluding, no doubt, to the Government of the *Roman State*, under which he lived, which was then Monarchical) *Submit yourselves*, saith he, *πάσῃ ἀνθρώπινῃ κτίσει*, to every *Human Constitution for the Lord's sake: Whether it be to the King, as Supreme; or unto the Governors, as unto them that are sent by him—for so is the Will of God*. Upon which Words of his, the *Homily* of our Church, appointed to be read on this Day, doth thus gloss:

“ St. *Peter* doth not say, Submit yourselves unto me, as supreme Head of the Church: Neither, saith he, Submit yourselves, from Time to Time, to my Successors in *Rome*: But he saith, Submit yourselves unto your *King*, your Supreme Head, and to those that he appointeth in Authority under him. This is God's Ordinance, this is God's Holy Will, that the whole *Body*, in every Realm, and all the Members and Parts of the same, shall be subject to their *Head*, their *King*.

As for the *Subjection* and *Obedience* that is to be paid to these *Principalities* and *Powers*, which is the other Thing I am to enquire into, it consists of a great many Particulars.

It implies in it, for instance, That we should give all Honour, Respect, and Reverence to their Persons, looking upon them (which really they are) as God's *Vicegerents* upon Earth.

That we should not rashly censure their Actions, or the Administration of their Government.

That we should at no hand despise them, or speak Evil of them, remembering the Character that St. *Jude* gives of those that *despise Dominions, and speak Evil of Dignities*.

That as we should make *Prayers*, and *Supplications*, and *Intercessions*, and giving of *Thanks* for all Men; so more especially for *them*, and those that are put in Authority under them, as St. *Paul* teaches us.

That we should pay them the *Tributes* and *Customs* that are due to them, as the same Apostle expresses it; that is, the Expenses we are legally taxed at, towards the Support of their Government.

That we should, according to our Power, maintain their *Jura Majestatis*, the *Rights* and *Prerogatives* belonging, by the Constitution, to their Office and Dignity.

The Second Sermon.

That we should assist and defend them against their Enemies.

That we should behave ourselves peaceably and modestly in our particular Vocations, endeavouring to make their Government as easy and as happy as we can, but at no hand to invade any *publick Office* that belongs not to us.

In a Word, That we should yield *Obedience* to all their Laws. And in case it ever happen that we cannot with a safe Conscience *obey*, there we are patiently to suffer the Penalties of our *Disobedience*, but by no means either to affront their *Persons*, or to disturb their *Government*, by raising or partaking in any *Tumult*, or *Insurrection*, or *Rebellion*.

All this that I have now named, is contained in that Duty of *Subjection* and *Obedience* which we are here bid to pay to *Principalities* and *Powers*, as might easily be shewn, as to every Particular: But I will not tire you by running through all these Heads, and therefore shall only desire leave to speak a little to the *two* last Things I have now mentioned; both because they are the most general, and do in a manner comprehend the rest; and because they seem principally intended in the Text I am now discoursing of. *Put them in mind* (saith St. Paul) *to be subject*, and *put them in mind to obey*. In the one Phrase seems to be intimated

estimated the Duty of *Active Obedience* to the Laws and Orders of our Governors: In the other Phrase, our *Submission* where we cannot obey.

And *First* of all, As for the Business of *Active Obedience* (for it is proper to begin with that first) all that is needful to be said for the clearing of it, may be comprised in these *four* following Propositions.

1st, That the standing *Laws* of every Country, are the Rule of the Subject's *Obedience*, and not merely the *Will* of the Prince.

Where, indeed, the *Legislative* and the *Executive* Power are both in one hand (as it is in those we call *Absolute Monarchies*) there the *Will* of the Prince stands for Law. But where People are so happy as to live under a Legal Establishment, as Ours is, there the *publick* Laws must govern and steer their Actions, and not the Prince's *private* Pleasure: So that, though *the King can do no Wrong* (as our Maxim is) yet the Subject is answerable for every thing he doth against Law, even when he doth it by the King's Command.

2^{dly}, Whatever Laws are made by just Authority, whether in *Civil* Matters, or in Matters relating to *Religion*, if they be not contrary to God's Laws, there the Subject is bound in Conscience to obey them, even though he apprehends they are inconvenient.

I own, indeed, that the *Matter* of some Laws may be of so small Importance, that a Man shall not need much to charge his Conscience with the Observance of them, it being enough that he submit to the *Penalty*, in case of Transgression; and, perhaps, the Government never meant to extend their Obligation farther: But, for all that, it is in the Power of the *Legislative*, when there is Reason, to bind our Consciences to *Obedience*, as well as to award Punishments to our *Disobedience*. And the Reason of this is evident; because we are bound by the Laws of God, who hath the supreme Dominion over our Consciences, to obey our *Lawful Governors* in *Lawful Things*.

Nay, I say farther (which is my *Third Proposition*) that even where we *doubt* of the Lawfulness of their Commands, we are bound to obey; so long as we only *doubt* of their Lawfulness, but are not *persuaded* that they are Unlawful.

For certainly the Authority of our Governors ought to over-rule any Man's private Doubts. There is all the Reason in the World that it should do so: And there is no good Reason to be urged to the contrary.

Pray, what is it we mean, when we say, that a Man *doubts* concerning a Thing, whether it be lawful or no? Is it not this; that his Judgment is kept suspended between
equal

equal Probabilities on both sides of a Question? He is inclined by some Reasons to believe that the Thing is *lawful*; and he is inclined by other Reasons, to believe that the Thing is *unlawful*: And these Reasons do appear so equally probable to him on both sides, that he doth not know how to determine himself: He doth not know which way he should frame a Judgment about the Point in question.

This is the Notion of a *Doubt*. Now, in such a Case as this, when *Authority* interposeth, and declareth itself on one side, and pronounceth not only that the Thing is lawful to be done, but also, that it will have it done; and accordingly lays its Commands upon the Man to do it; I say, if there be not so much weight in *Authority* as to turn the Scale in such a Case as this, and to oblige a Man to act in Obedience to it, it is the lightest thing in the world, and signifies very little as to the influencing the Affairs of Mankind.

But, *Fourthly*, and *Lastly*, if the Matter be out of *doubt*, if a Man be really convinced that the Thing which *Authority* commands him, is not lawful in itself, but is contradictory to the Laws of God; in that case he must not do the Thing commanded; on the contrary, he is bound to forbear the Practice of it.

If

If any human Law, let it be made by the best Authority upon Earth, should command us to *believe* any Point in Matters of *Faith*, which we are persuaded to be contrary to the Revelation of *Christ* and his Apostles; or should command us to *profess* and declare our Belief of any Matter whatsoever, though never so indifferent, when yet we did not really *believe* it; or lastly, should oblige us to the doing of any Action, which we did in our own Conscience judge to be a Transgression of a divine Command: I say, in none of these Cases are we to yield Obedience to the *Law*, by what Authority soever it was enacted. And the Reason is plain: We must always chuse to obey God rather than *Men*. Where God's Law hath commanded us, there no Human Law can absolve us from the Obligation: Where God's Law hath forbidden us, there no Human Law can lay Obligations upon us.

And it is the same thing as to our Practice, that we believe God's Law hath tied us up, as if it had really done so: So that, whether we are really in the right, or in the wrong, as to our *Persuasions* in these Matters, we must not act against them, because we must not act against our Consciences: only this we are to remember, that it extremely concerns us rightly to inform our Consciences in these Matters, where Human
Laws

Laws have interposed their Authority; for if we make a wrong Judgment of Things, and upon that account deny our Obedience to the Laws, where we should have given it; though we ought not to act against our Conscience, as I said (nay, it would be a great Sin in us if we should) yet, on the other side, we are not to be excused for disobeying the Commands of Authority, where we might lawfully have obey'd them; unless it should prove, that it was through no Fault of ours that our Judgments were misinform'd.

And thus much concerning my *First* Head, that of *Obedience to Laws*: I now come to the other, that of *Subjection*; as that Word implies *patient* Submission to our Governors, where we cannot *actively* comply with what they require of us.

And this is that Doctrine of *Passive Obedience* which of late hath had so ill a Sound among many of us: But I dare say, for no **other** reason, but because it may have been by **some** misrepresented: For wherever it is rightly understood, it can give Offence to none, but to such as are really disaffected to the Government, and do desire Alterations.

That there is such a *Submission* due from all Subjects to the Supreme Authority of the Place where they live, as shall tie up their Hands from opposing or resisting it by Force,
is

is evident from the very Nature and Ends of *Political Society*. And I dare say, there is not that Country upon Earth, let the Form of their Government be what it will (*Absolute Monarchy, Legal Monarchy, Aristocracy, or Common-wealth*) where this is not a Part of the Constitution. Subjects must obey *passively*, where they cannot obey *actively*; otherwise the Government would be precarious, and the publick Peace at the Mercy of every Malecontent; and a Door would be set open to all the Insurrections, Rebellions, and Treasons in the World.

Nor is this only a *State Doctrine*, but the Doctrine also of *Jesus Christ*, and that a necessary, indispensable one too; as sufficiently appears from those famous Words of *St. Paul*, *Rom. xiii. 1, 2.* which are so plain, that they need no Comment: *Let every Soul (saith he) be subject to the bigger Powers, for there is no Power but of God; and the Powers that be, are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the Power, resisteth the Ordinance of God; and they that resist, shall receive to themselves Damnation.* So that, so long as this Text stands in our Bibles, the Doctrine of *Non-resistance*, or *Passive Obedience*, must be of Obligation to all *Christians*.

But then, after I have said this, Care must be taken that this *General Doctrine* be

be not misapply'd in *particular* Countries. Though *Non-resistance* or *Passive Obedience* be a Duty to all Subjects, and under all Governments, yet it is not expressed the same way in all Places; but both the *Objects*, and the *Instances* of it do vary in different Nations, according to the different Models of their Government.

To speak this as plainly as I can. As the Laws of the Land are the Measures of our *Active Obedience*, so are also the same Laws the Measures of our *Submission*. And as we are not bound to *obey*, but where the Laws and Constitution require our *Obedience*; so neither are we bound to *submit*, but as the Laws and Constitution do require our *Submission*.

Taking now this to be the true stating of the Doctrine of *Passive Obedience*, as I verily believe it is, I do not see what colour of Reason can be offer'd against it. Sure I am, the common Pretence, that it tends to introduce *Tyranny*, and *Arbitrary Government*, and to make People *Slaves*, is quite out of Doors: For you see, it makes no Princes *Absolute*, where, by the Constitution, they were not so before. Nor doth it destroy any *Liberty* of the Subjects, that they were before in possession of. All that it doth, is to preserve and secure the National Settlement in the same *Posture*, and upon the same *Foot*, in and upon which
it

it is already establish'd. And this is so true, that there is not a Common-wealth in the World so free, but that these Doctrines of *Non-resistance* and *Passive Obedience* must for ever be taught there, as necessary even for the Preservation of their *Liber-ties*.

As for what this Doctrine imports among us, and in our Constitution, or how far it is to be extended or limited, it belongs not to me to determine: But thus much the Occasion of this Day's Meeting will not only warrant me, but oblige me to say upon this Head, and it is all the *Ap-plication* I shall now make; namely,

That, by all the Laws of this Land, the *Person* of the KING is sacred and inviolable; and, That to attempt his *Life* in any Way, or upon any Pretence, always was and is *High-treason*. And if so, what are we to think of that *Fact*, which was on this Day committed upon the *Person* of our late Sovereign, of Blessed Memory, King *Charles I.* taking it with all its Circumstances? Why certainly, how slight soever some People among us may make of it, 'twas a most barbarous Murder; a Violation of the Laws of GOD and Man, a Scandal to the *Protestant Religion*, and a Reproach to the People of *England*; whilst the impious Rage of a few stands imputed by our Adversaries to the whole Nation.

All

All this I may say of this *Fact*; for it is no more than is said of it by the *Lords* and *Commons* of *England* in that Act of Parliament, which appoints the keeping of this Day as a perpetual *Fast*.

I am sensible how uneasy some are at the mentioning of this; and how gladly they would have both the Thing, and the Memorial of it forgot among us. I must confess, I could wish so too, provided we were sure that *God* had forgot it; so, I mean, forgot it, as that we were no longer obnoxious to his Judgments, upon the Account of that innocent Blood: And provided likewise, in the second place, that those *Factionous, Republican* Principles which have once overturn'd our Government, and brought an excellent Prince to an unhappy End, were so far forgot among us, as that there was no Danger from them of ever having this or the like *Tragedy* acted again in our Nation. But so long as we have Apprehensions from either of these Things, so long it will be fit for us to remember this *Fact*, and this Day; and both to implore the Mercy of God, that neither the Guilt of that sacred and innocent Blood, nor those other Sins, by which God was provoked to deliver up both us and our King into the Hands of cruel and unreasonable Men, may at any time hereafter be visited upon us, or our Posterity: And likewise to suffer ourselves

selves to be put in mind of that Duty, which by *St. Paul's* Authority, I have been all this while insisting on, namely, *to be subject to Principalities and Powers, and to obey Magistrates*: Or, if you will rather take it in the Words of *Solomon*, Prov. xxiv. 21. *To fear the Lord and the King, and not to meddle with them that are given to Change.*



S E R-

SERMON III.

Preached before the

K I N G

I N

St. *JAMES*'s Chapel,

On *Palm-Sunday, March 24.* 1792.

St. *JOHN* xx. 29.

— *Blessed are they that have not
seen, and yet have believed.*

THESE are our Saviour's Words to St. *Thomas* after his Resurrection. The Occasion of them was this: The other Disciples had assured *Thomas*, that our Saviour was risen from the Dead, and that he had in Person appeared to them. *Thomas* would not believe this upon their Report, but required farther

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Evidence. *Except (saith he) I shall see in his Hands the Prints of the Nails, and thrust my Hand into his Side, I will not believe.* The next time that our Saviour appeared to them, *Thomas* was in the Company, and then he was pleased to give him such a Proof of his Resurrection as he himself had stood upon: For he calls upon him, and bids him *reach forth his Finger, and behold his Hands*, where the Print of the Nails was, *and reach forth his Hand, and thrust it into his Side*, and after this, *not to be faithless, but believing.* Hereupon *Thomas* owns himself fully convinced, and in Token thereof, *he answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.* Then come in the Words of the Text: *Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.*

In which Words, our Saviour tacitly reproves *Thomas* for his Incredulity, in not believing a Matter of Fact well attested, unless he himself saw it; so he lays down an universal Proposition for the Encouragement of all Mankind in future Ages of the World, to *believe* in him, though they had not *seen* him.

Our Saviour knew very well, that this was to be the Case of far the greatest Part that were to believe in him. For it was only to the Men of that Age in which he lived, and of that Country where he conversed, to whom

whom it was given to hear from his own Mouth his divine Doctrines, and to see with their Eyes the Proofs that he gave of his divine Mission, particularly that illustrious one of his Resurrection from the Dead. But for all the succeeding Generations of Men, they were to *believe* without *seeing*. Their Faith was not to be grounded on the Evidence of their own Senses, but on the Testimony of those that had had that Evidence. And therefore for the obliging and encouraging all Mankind, in the Ages to come, to embrace his Religion upon such Motives and such Evidence as this, he pronounceth these Words; *Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.*

I doubt not but that all Christians are fully satisfied both of the Truth and Reason of this Proposition of our Saviour, and are convinced that they have Motives enough to oblige them to believe in him, and to own his Religion; though they never saw, nor were capable of seeing the original Proofs and Evidence he gave for the Truth of it. Indeed, if it were otherwise, none of us at this Day could be Christians upon rational Grounds. But this Doctrine will not pass among all Men. On the contrary, by several, their not *Seeing*, is made the great, if not the only Pretence, for their not *Believing*. This being so, I hope it will not be Time mispent, if I endeavour to answer

this Plea of theirs ; and I think, I cannot to better Purpose discourse upon this Text, than by doing so.

The Case is this. Some there are among us that endeavour to run down all *Revealed Religion*. If you ask them, whether then they are for any Religion at all ? They will tell you, Yes ; they are for that which *natural Reason* teacheth. We wish they were in good Earnest when they say this : For then we should hope to be soon all of a Mind. For we cannot doubt but that whosoever doth sincerely believe all that *Natural Reason* will teach him about Religion, and doth seriously endeavour to frame his Life accordingly ; such a one will not fail to embrace *Christianity*, whenever the Doctrines of our Saviour, and the Proofs he gave for the Truth of them, are fairly represented to him. But, in truth, these Mens loose way, both of discoursing and of living, renders it suspicious, that their Profession of *Natural Religion* is not very sincere ; but only for the sheltring them from the Imputation of Atheism, and serving other secular Ends. For such a *Scheme* of *Natural Religion* have they framed to themselves, as will not much trouble their Consciences, let them *live* how they will. But now the *Christian Religion* (which is that they chiefly oppose under the Name of *Revealed Religion*) is a more stubborn Thing,

Thing, and will not so easily be brought to comply with their Humors and Inclinations. And *that* we fear, though they are loth to own it, is the secret Reason of their Grudge against it. The Gospel of *Christ* doth not favour such Sort of Principles as these Men have taken up, nor such a Kind of Life as they are engaged in; but on the contrary, severely declares against them. And therefore some colourable Reasons must be found out, for the setting aside the Authority of this Gospel, which is so contradictory to their *Interests*. But how is this to be come by?

To object against the Sufficiency of the Proof that our Saviour gave to the World of his being sent from God to teach this Religion to Mankind, that there is no colour for: For they are sensible, that if his History, as it is related in the Gospel, be admitted to be a true History, so that one may depend upon the Matters of Fact there recorded concerning him: If this, I say, be admitted, it cannot be denied, but that our Saviour gave abundant Evidence, that he was what he pretended to be, the Son of God, and the great Prophet whom all Men were to be obedient to, if they meant to be saved.

Since therefore they cannot fasten upon this, they pitch upon another Method.

They endeavour to run down all our Evidence for the Truth of *Christ's* Religion, by making a Difference between *seeing* our Saviour's Miracles, and *reading* them in a Book. They will allow, that if any Man heard or saw *Jesus Christ* speaking those Things, or doing those Things which are recorded of him; such a Man would have sufficient Reason to induce him to be his Disciple: But they deny that they have any such Reason to be so, because they neither *heard* nor *saw* any of those Things; nor are they convinced that such Things were ever done. They reproach us, that when they desire of us a Proof of the Christian Religion, all the Answer they can obtain of us is, that they must go to such a Book (which we call the Bible) and that will satisfy them. But why should they pin their Faith upon any Book in the World? This is what they urge for their Infidelity.

This now being the State of the Controversy between Us and several of the Unbelievers among us, you see it turns upon this single Point that is now before us; namely, Whether a Man that does not *see*, may not have sufficient Reason to *believe* at many hundred Years distance? Or more particularly thus; Whether we in these Days, who never *saw* our Saviour, nor his Miracles (particularly that of his *Resurrection*, with Reference to
which

which these Words were spoken) have not abundant Reason to believe in him, upon the Testimony of those that did see all these Things? We say we have. They say we have not. Here therefore we join Issue.

Now for the making good our Side of the Question, I proceed by these Steps.

In the *first* Place, We lay it down as a Principle, and, I suppose, every body will agree to it; that if *Jesus Christ* and his Apostles, when they first preached the Gospel, did give sufficient Proof and Evidence that what they preached was from God; and likewise, if both the Doctrine they preached, and the Proof and Evidence they gave for it, be faithfully transmitted to us; and with such Certainty likewise, that we cannot have any reasonable Doubt that it is so transmitted: Then, I say, we can have no reason in the Earth to complain, that we want Evidence for the Truth of the Gospel. I do not say *yet*, that we have as strong Proof, as if we had seen or heard those Things our selves: But, I say, we have sufficient Proof to convince any reasonable unbiaſſed Man: This, I presume, no body will deny, and it is all that we ask at present.

In the *second* Place, I believe none will deny, that what was once really spoken, or what was once really done, may be

truly and faithfully put into Writing. And it is possible, likewise, that those Writings may come so well attested, to them that live many Ages after those Things were spoken, or done, that none in any Age can reasonably doubt that they give a true and faithful Account of the Things therein reported to be done or taught. I say, I believe, none will deny this; for if it be not admitted, we can give no Credit to any History that was written; nor, consequently, to any Matter of Fact that was done in former Ages. It therefore will, I hope, be granted, that both the Doctrines of our Saviour, and his Proofs of them, might in this way, if God so pleased, be so faithfully transmitted to Posterity, that future Ages might certainly come to the Knowledge of them.

In the *third* Place we say, That it is obvious to all Mankind, that if ever there was any Affair in the World, wherein the Providence of God was concerned, that there should be a faithful Conveyance of it made to all Generations to come; and carrying the Marks of its own Credibility, this Affair of the Gospel of *Christ* was such a one; because the Importance of it to all the Children of Men was such, that their Salvation or Damnation, to the End of the World, did depend upon the Belief of it, if the Author of this Gospel delivered

livered a true Doctrine. And therefore we may certainly conclude, that if what *Christ* taught at the first, was from God; God would take care that what he taught, together with sufficient Proof of the Truth of it, should be conveyed to all the Ages of the World. And if this was to be contained in a Book; we may likewise be assured, that Book should come to us, with such Evidence of its being true, that we could have no reasonable Suspicion concerning it. We are sure God's Providence hath taken care that Writings of an ancienter Date than the Gospel, that are of infinitely less Consequence to Mankind, should come down to us without any Suspicion of Imposture: And can it be imagined then, his Providence should be unconcerned, in preserving and bringing safe to our Hands, the Records of a Thing, by the Belief or Denial of which, the Eternal State of Men in the other World is to be concluded?

In the *fourth* Place, having laid these Foundations, we advance a Step higher. It is certain, that there was a timely and a faithful Record of all Things that *Jesus Christ* taught, in order to Salvation, and of all the Proofs he gave for the Truth and Divinity of his Doctrine: And this Record is contained in the Books of the New Testament,

That

That this is true Matter of Fact, we have all the Proof that a Thing of this Nature is capable of. These Books were written, either by Men that were *Eye* and *Ear* Witneses of our Saviour's Miracles, and Doctrine, and Conversation; or by such as conversed with those that were. This appears not only from the Writings themselves, which carry in them all the Marks of their being written by Persons so qualified; but also from the constant Tradition that hath in all Ages gone in the World, about the Authors of these Writings. And you may with as much, or more reason doubt, that those Writings among us, which go under the Name of *Cicero*, or *Cæsar*, or *Seneca*; or any other most unquestioned Author, were none of theirs, but forged since their Times, than you can doubt that the Gospels of St. *Matthew*, *Mark*, and *John*, and *Luke's* both Gospel and Acts of the Apostles, and St. *Paul's* Epistles, were not writ by those Authors, or in the Age they pretend to be. I say, there is a great deal more Reason to doubt of that, than there is of this: Because we have not only all the Proofs of the Genuineness of those Writings, that can be given for any other Writings, which are the most unquestioned in the World; but this over and above, which is compatible to none but these; namely, that the Matter of these Writings is of such

a Nature, that all Mankind were concerned to detect the Fraud and the Forgery of them, if there had been any: But yet they have always passed under the Names they bear at this Day; nay, and in every Age, from the first publishing of them, we have authentick Authorities, in a continued Succession to vouch for them.

Well, but supposing these Men to be the Authors of these Writings; yet how can we depend upon the Truth of what they have reported?

In Answer to this, I say, in the *fifth* Place, Let any Man read them, and then speak from his Conscience, Whether he does not think that these Men were in good Earnest, and did really write according to their own inward Sense? And yet the Matters they wrote were such, as it was not possible they could be deceived about them, because they were all plain Matters of Fact; Things which their *Eyes* and *Ears* were Witnesses of. But that is not all: They who lived in those Days, and had full Opportunities of examining the Truth of what they had written, gave Testimony to them; since they built their Faith upon the Matters of Fact they had delivered. If therefore you suppose these Writers to be sincere honest Men, it is certain that what they recorded concerning our Lord *Jesus*, and his Doctrines, and his Actions,

Actions, must be true. On the other Side, if you suppose them to have had Designs of imposing upon the World with a false Story; you must, at the same Time, suppose a great Number of People (of whom there is no ground for such a Suspicion) to be perfect Fools or Madmen, who gave so much Credit to all that Matter which they related concerning our Saviour, that they laid down their Lives to attest the Truth of it.

I know nothing to be said against this, unless it be, That though they could not well be supposed to be mistaken in the Matters of Fact which they relate concerning our Saviour, yet they might in the Matter of his *Doctrines*. These they might misrepresent, and consequently their Writings ought not to be of that Authority with us, as that we should be bound to believe all that they say. But to this I give a very short Answer; If we do admit them to be true Reporters of Matters of *Fact*, we must also of Necessity admit them to be true Reporters, nay, I say more, infallible Reporters of our Saviour's *Doctrine*; so as that their Declarations of it must for ever conclude all Christians. And the Reason is this: The Authors of these Writings were either Apostles, or apostolick Men, as has been said before; and it is one of the Matters of *Fact* report-

ed in these Writings, that our Saviour did so assist these Men with his Holy Spirit, that they were enabled faithfully and infallibly to preach that Doctrine to others which he had delivered to them. Now, if we be sure they were inspired in what they *preached*, we may be as much assured they were inspired in *putting* what they *preached* into *Writing*, since it was the same Doctrine that they *preached* and that they *wrote*; and, especially, since after it was written it was to remain to all succeeding Generations, and to be a *Rule of Mens Faith* so long as the World should last. And further, We are sure that all the Christians of those Days did look upon those Writings to have a Stamp of divine Authority upon them, and distinguished them from all other human Compositions. And to evidence this, they made these Writings to be the Standard of their Belief; the *Measure* by which they tried all *Opinions* and *Doctrines* in Religion: So that whatever was not found in these Scriptures, was not accounted as necessary to Salvation; and whatever was found disagreeing from these Scriptures, was rejected as an Innovation, or an Error in Christianity: And of this we have sufficient Evidence from Antiquity.

Well, but how shall we know whether these Scriptures be faithfully transmitted down to us? How do we know
but

but that they may have been corrupted since the Time they were written, and made to speak different Things now, from what they did at the first? This is the last Question upon this Argument; and in Answer to it I say, in the *sixth* Place,

If the Providence of God, as I told you before, was ever concerned to preserve any Writings from being depraved or corrupted; it was certainly more especially concerned to do it, as to the Writings we are now speaking of, they being of such vast Importance to all the Generations of Mankind. But I do not leave the Matter so: There is Evidence of *Fact* as well as Reason to be offered in this Case.

Let the Books of the New Testament, as we now have them, be tried by the severest Rules of Criticism: Let the *Copies* both ancient and modern, which are extant of them, be compared: Let the several *Versions* of them likewise that were made, in the earliest Times, be examined: Lastly, Let all the *Ecclesiastical* Writers, from the Beginning of Christianity to this Day, who have either commented upon them, or proved any Doctrine from them, or but occasionally quoted them in their Writings, be searched into, it will appear, by all these Ways of Trial, that our Scriptures are the same at this Day, that they were at the Beginning, without any material Difference.

Indeed,

Indeed, considering the Multitude of Copies that were taken of these Books, and the several Translations that were made of them into other Languages, even shortly after the Time they were first published; we cannot imagine it possible, that, in After-ages, any Thing could be foisted into them, to serve the Turn of any *Party*, but the Imposture would have been presently discovered. And accordingly we find, that when any Attempts of this kind have been made, there were not wanting those who took care to detect and expose them.

I do not, when I say this, deny that there are many Differences and *various Readings* to be met with, in the ancient Copies of these Books, occasioned by the Negligence or Mistakes of Transcribers: Nay, and some few Passages may be wanting, in some Copies, that are found in others. But then I desire it may be observed, that these Differences are of such small Moment, that it is of no Importance to the Christian Faith, which of the Readings be right, and which of them be wrong; for they all agree in all the Matters which concern either our *Saviour's Doctrines*, or his *Precepts*, or the *Proofs* he gave of his Divine Mission: And farther Agreement than this, I think, none needs to desire.

Indeed, if slight and *verbal* Differences, in Copies, be a good Argument against the Genuineness of a Writing, we have no genuine Writing of any ancient Author at this Day; for the same Thing has happened to all old Books whatsoever, that have been often transcribed: And to suppose that it should be otherwise, in the Books of the Scripture, is to suppose, that God ought in every Age, as immediately and infallibly to guide the *Pen* of every Transcriber of them, as he did the *Minds* of their first Authors.

To make now a little Reflection on what I have said about the Scriptures of the *New-Testament*. It is urged by our Deists, as a very hard Thing, that whereas, when the Gospel was first preached, Men had Opportunities of being convinced by their Senses of the Truth of it; (or, at least, it is pretended they had such Opportunities) we now are only referred to a Book that gives us an Account of these Matters: Why, I desire to know, what other Way they would have had an Account of them but by Books? Would they have had our Saviour to come down from Heaven every *Fifty* or *Threescore* Years, and to preach the same Doctrine, and confirm it by the same Miracles to the Men of that Generation, that he once did among the *Jews*? Yet this must be supposed necessary for him to do, if Men cannot

cannot otherwise be convinced of the Truth of his Religion, but by their Senses: Nay, that would not be enough, he must not only publish his Doctrine, and repeat his Miracles to every *Age*, but to every individual *Man* of every *Age*; otherwise *all* Men had not Opportunity of being convinced by their *Senses*, and consequently, could not, upon reasonable Grounds, believe in him. But if this Supposition be absurd, as it certainly is, then we must be content (and there is all the Reason in the World we should be so) with that sort of Evidence for the Truth of his Gospel, that other Matters of Fact, done at a great distance of Time from us, are capable of: That is to say, Authentick Witnesses of them at the first; and the Testimony of those Witnesses faithfully transmitted down to Posterity. And how any Testimony can be more faithfully transmitted than by the Way of Writing, let them shew us, if they can.

And then, as for the Books or Writings that we refer you to in this Case, we ask no more for the gaining Credit to them, than only, that it may be seriously considered, of what Sort they are, and what Authority they carry along with them.

We do not send you to *Herodotus*, and *Pliny*, or such-like Writers, who, though

they were very good Authors, yet took a great deal of what they said, from uncertain Reports.

Much less do we send you to a *Golden Legend*, or the Lives of the Saints, as they have been written of later Days by Men, who took advantage of the Ignorance and Credulity of the Age they lived in, to obtrude what they pleased upon the World.

But we send you to Authors, who themselves knew, and were Witnesses of what they wrote.

Who gave all possible Proof of their Sincerity and Integrity, not only by publicly, in all Places, asserting the Truth of what they had written, but some of them also sealing it with their Blood.

Who were so assisted with the Divine Spirit, that they themselves wrought the same Miracles, for the Confirmation of *Christ's* Doctrine, that they had recorded him to have done.

And lastly, Who in all succeeding Ages were had in such Veneration among *Christians*, that their Writings were esteemed the Platform and Standard of true Faith; and upon which they set so high a Value, that they would keep them at the Peril of their Lives. And Instances we have of Multitudes, who rather chose Torments and Death, than they would deliver up their Bibles.

Taking

Taking now all this together, can any thing like it be said for the Truth or the Authority of any other Book in the World?

But this is not All. I desire, in the *Seventh* and *last* Place, it may be considered, That we do not send you to a bare Book for the Proof of the Christian Religion, how much soever that Book may have the Marks, not only of a True and Genuine, but also of a Divine History: But we insist upon a great many other Things for the Proof of the Matters contained in that Book, besides the Authority of the Book itself.

If, indeed, nothing had followed upon *Christ's* publishing his Gospel, and we had never heard more of it, or him, save what we might happen to meet with in those Old Writings; I do not know how far their Evidence alone, now, at the distance of near seventeen hundred Years, would have prevailed with us to embrace his Religion: But now, when we see and are convinced, that so many remarkable Effects ensued upon his Preaching in the World, and still continue visible at this Day; which yet cannot be ascribed to any other Cause, than to the particular Power and Providence of God, which was concerned to justify our Saviour, and his Pretensions to the World: This is certainly a new Evidence, and a standing one, both

for that *Book* which mentions all these Things, and, especially, for that *Cause* it maintains.

The Case of the Christian Religion is plainly this: *Jesus Christ*, a mean Person as to his outward Circumstances, sets up for a Preacher of a New Religion, and this, not in the Times of Ignorance and Barbarism (when an Imposture might be supposed more easy to be carried on, and which Advantages *Mahomet* afterwards made use of) but in the Reign of *Augustus Cæsar*, when Learning, and Arts and Sciences were in the most flourishing Condition that ever they were known to be.

He chuses a Company of very ordinary *Unlettered* Men, but very *Honest* Men, to be the Witnesses of his Conversation and Doctrine; and these he designs for the Spreaders of his Religion throughout the World.

He neither makes use of Arts nor Arms for the gaining Disciples to himself; only declares plainly, that He is the Person, whom God had long before promised to send, and whom He did now send, to publish Eternal Salvation to all that should believe in him.

The Religion which He taught, and which all his Followers were to take upon them, was so far from gratifying *Flesh* and *Blood*, that it seemed much better contrived, as
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the World then stood, for the frightening Men from it, than for the alluring Proselytes to it.

For there was nothing in it that ministered to any sensual or worldly Purposes; nothing that tended to make a Man either wise, or rich, or great, or happy, in the Sense of this World, but all the quite contrary: He that would be his Disciple, must quit all the popular Notions about Happiness: Instead of being thought Wise, must submit to be counted a Fool for *Christ's* sake: Instead of getting Wealth, or Honour, or Preferment, must be prepared to part with all these Things, if he was already possessed of them; must deny himself, and all his Temporal Interests; nay, must forsake Father and Mother, and his own Life also, whenever he was called to it. The Way to Heaven, as He taught it, was by Humility and Meekness, and Contempt of the World and all the Glories of it; by patient suffering Afflictions and Injuries, and an absolute Resignation of ourselves to God, to do and suffer whatever was his Will. And He himself, as he lived thus, so did he thus go off the Stage; being, after Three Years preaching this sort of Doctrine, hanged up on a Cross, as an Impostor, and that by the Vote of his own Countrymen.

Where now was the Temptation to the Generality of Men, to own this Man as a Prophet sent from God to Mankind? Why, in truth, by what I have yet represented, there was very little: Nay, indeed, to any one that considers these Beginnings of the Gospel, it will be Matter of Astonishment that any more came of it, and that it did not presently die with the Author of it.

But here was the Thing: Our Lord, in how poor a Condition soever he lived, yet he *spake as never Man spake*. He so explained the Old Scriptures, which foretold of him; He taught such important Truths concerning another Life, concerning the Nature and Providence of God, and his Mercy to lost Mankind, and the Way in which he would be served, and in what sort of Things it was that true Religion did consist, that he pierced the very Souls of those that heard him. There was so much Evidence in the Truths themselves that he delivered, that no honest, virtuously disposed Minds could stand out against them, but must be convinced in their own Consciences, that *this*, of all that they had ever heard of, was a Religion worthiest to come from God, and most accommodated to the *Spiritual* Needs of Men; nay, and their *Temporal* ones too, supposing that all Men would embrace it.

And

And then the whole Tenor of his Life was suitable hereunto: For he appeared, in all his Actions and Conversation, to be a Man of so much Candour, and Goodness, and Clearness of Spirit; so humble, so just, so prudent, so charitable, so obliging to all Mankind; so full of Piety, and Devotion, and Resignation to GOD; and, lastly, so free from all Suspicion that he carried on any selfish Designs, that all these heavenly Doctrines came better out of his Mouth, than if any other had delivered them.

But that which crowned all, was this; that throughout the whole Stage of his Life there was a visible Evidence of a Divine Power and Presence going along with him, which shewed itself in a thousand Instances of the most glorious Miracles that ever were seen or heard of in the World, and that to the Amazement of the whole Country where he lived.

In this manner, I say, did our Saviour lay the Foundation for a Belief of his Doctrine, to all succeeding Generations; and a solid, unshaken Foundation it was.

But yet, for all that, if the Power of God had stopped here, I do not know what Superstructure would ever have been made upon this Foundation.

For so it was, that those very Men, those honest plain-hearted Men, that he had taken into his Family, to be Witnesses of what he

did and taught, with a design, as I told you, of sending them abroad to publish all those Things throughout the World; yet, when he came to die, such poor-spirited Creatures they proved, that every Man of them forsook him.

O sad Example of human Frailty and Inconstancy! Those Men that had the greatest Opportunities of knowing him, and his Doctrine, and had professed the most firm Resolutions of adhering to him, yet all forsook him in the Hour of Danger, and shifted for themselves.

But God Almighty, though he suffered good Men to act as Men, did not therefore lay aside that great Design he had set on foot by our *Lord Jesus*; no, nor of accomplishing it by the Ministry of these very Men.

For he raised up his Son from the Dead on the Third Day (as our Saviour had before told them he would) and this put new Life and Spirit into those Persons that had lately abandoned him.

But that was not all: Our Saviour calls them all together, after he was thus risen from the Dead: He acquaints them with the Work that he had committed to them: He assures them, that he will be with them, and those that should succeed them in that Ministry, for ever: Not in Person; for he was to continue in Heaven, to intercede
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for all Believers at the right Hand of God; but by the Virtue and Presence of the Holy Spirit, who was to be his Deputy and Vicegerent upon Earth. This Holy Spirit he would, in a few Days, send down upon them, who should effectually furnish and endue them with all Powers, and Qualities, and Abilities needful for the Discharge of so great a Work, as the Conversion of the World to his Religion was. And after he had told them these Things, he visibly, in their Presence, ascended up into Heaven.

Here now begins CHRIST's Kingdom. He had conquer'd *Death* before, and now he comes to conquer the *Devil* and the *World*: From henceforward you hear of no Fear, no Pusillanimity, no mean Behaviour in any of the Apostles. They then go and preach to all the World that Gospel, which their Master order'd them. No Danger frights them: No human Learning or Philosophy is able to stand before them. The greatest Obstacles, the greatest Terrors that come in their Way, are so far from making them quit the Work they had begun, that they rather prove Incentives to them to go on in it. They make it their Business to gain Souls in every place to *Jesus Christ*: They run about the whole *Roman Empire*, and farther than ever that extended. They pretend to no
Eloquence,

quence, no polite Learning, no Arts of Infination; but they preach a plain, honest, pious Doctrine; but withal such a Doctrine, that as the Times then went, a Man must expect to bid an everlasting Adieu to all the Wealth, and Pleasures, and Honours of this World, if he once embraced it. They declare to all People the Authority they had for the preaching this Doctrine: They vouch our Lord Jesus Christ as the Author of it, who *died* for the bearing Testimony to it, and *rose again* for its Confirmation, and is now King of Heaven and Earth. And they shewed, that they had an authentick Commission from Heaven for the doing all this, by speaking the Language of every Country where they came, without ever being taught it; by curing all diseased People that were brought to them; by dispossessing Devils; by giving Sight to the Blind, and making the Lame to walk, and restoring dead Bodies to Life.

All these wonderful Things they did all the World over. And what the Effects hereof were, was manifest every where, and continues manifest to this Day.

The Gospel spread like Lightning in all Places; and wherever it came, Pagan Idolatry was confounded, till at last the whole *Roman Empire* was converted to the Religion of *Jesus Christ*. Converted it was
by

by Men naked and unassisted, without the least Encouragement at the first from the Secular Powers; nay, in Contradiction to the severest Penalties that the Secular Powers could contrive or decree to hinder it.

We grant, indeed, that many Thousands of brave Men did lose their Lives in this *Religious War* between our Lord *Jesus Christ* and the Devil (who was then the Prince of this World) and did patiently submit to Death, that they might assert the Truth of our Saviour's Cause: But that was *Christ's Way* of vanquishing the Devil; he did thus *break the Serpent's Head*, while the Serpent *bruised his Heel*: And he did at last, by this Way, effectually break his Kingdom; as is visible and notorious even from that Time to this Day.

And now I appeal to every one, whether this, which is Matter of Fact, and known to all Men that look into the Histories of Time; and of which we, at this Day, see and enjoy the happy Effects, in having the Christian Religion not only receiv'd among us, but made a Part of our National Constitution: I say, whether this be not a convincing Proof, both of the Truth of our *Religion*, and likewise of those *Scriptures* from whence we fetch it.

Had

Had not the *Christian Religion* been true, How could these Things have ever come to pass, seeing 'tis utterly inconceivable that, without a divine Power, they could be effected? And sure none can suppose that God would exert his Power for the confirming of a Falshood.

And again; Had not our *Scriptures* been true likewise, or had they been the Fictions of any designing Men, How is it possible they should have given us an Account of these Things so long before they came to pass, and when there was so little Appearance of their ever coming to pass? And yet all that I have now mention'd is plainly there set down, as foretold by our Saviour and his Apostles: And not only those Things, but a great many other remarkable Events are there also foretold, which have since been exactly made good.

I hope, by what hath been said, it doth appear that we, at this Day, have sufficient Arguments to oblige us to believe and adhere to the Religion of *Jesus Christ*, tho' we never saw the *original Proofs* he gave of it; which was the Point I was to make good. For, I think I have shew'd, That if those *Proofs* were good and conclusive at the first, to them that saw them, and were Witnesses of them; they are so to us now, who receive them upon their Testimony.

And

And as for the Difference that may be alledged in Point of Evidence, between a Man's *seeing* a Thing, and receiving it upon the *Report* of others; all that, I think, by the Account I have given, is in a great measure out of Doors as to this Matter. For the *Report*, upon which we receive the Gospel, being so authentick, so unexceptionable, and likewise so confirm'd by Matters of Fact still visible to us, it amounts to as strong a Proof, as if we had Evidence of Sense. And I do in my Conscience believe, that there is not a Man in this Nation now stands out against the Religion of *Jesus Christ*, but who would have done so, if he had lived in the Time of our Saviour, and heard him preach the Gospel.

As for us who believe, let us persevere in our Faith without wavering: Our Faith is never the worse for not *seeing*: *Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.* And as for those that do not believe, their not *seeing* will be no Excuse for them, if our Saviour may be credited; for it was as well with respect to them that did not see, as to them that did, that he pronounced his definitive Sentence, when he sent out his Apostles to preach his Religion: *Go (saith he) and preach the Gospel to every Creature: He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned.*

God

God give us all Grace to consider the Things that belong to our everlasting Peace! That both all those who now oppose the *Truth as it is in Christ Jesus*, may be converted from the Error of their Ways; and, that all those who do own and profess it, may adorn the Doctrine of God, which he hath called them to, by a pure, holy, and unblameable Life; to the Glory of God, and the eternal Salvation of their Souls, in the Day of our Lord *Jesus*. *To whom, &c.*



S E R-

SERMON IV.

Preached at the

Coronation of Queen ANNE,

IN THE

Abbey Church at Westminster,

On the 23d of *April*, 1702.

ISAIAH xlix. 23.

*Kings shall be thy Nursing-fathers,
and their Queens thy Nursing-mo-
thers.*

I Am aware how much Time the following Solemnity will take up, and therefore I mean to give as little Interruption to it as possible; being very sensible, that the *Shortness* of my Sermon will be the best Recommendation of it. *Three* Things I beg Leave to do upon this Occasion,

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First,

First, To give some Account of the *Promise* here made in my *Text*; and what *Obligation* it lays upon *Princes*, with relation to their *Subjects*.

Secondly, To congratulate with You and the whole Kingdom, the happy Prospect we have of God's making good this *Promise* to us at this Day, in settling *Her present Majesty* upon the *Throne* of *Her Ancestors*.

Thirdly, To shew what Returns of *Duty* and *Gratitude*, and *Filial Obedience*, this Consideration of the *Queen's* being a *Nursing-mother* to Her People, doth call for from us, and all other Her Subjects.

I begin with the *First*.

This Chapter, out of which I have taken my *Text*, hath always been understood to be, and it certainly is a Prophecy of our Lord *Jesus Christ*, and of the Propagation of his *Religion*, and the spreading of his Church throughout the World: And it teacheth us, That tho' the Beginnings of this *Religion*, this *Church of Christ*, were very small and inconsiderable; yet in due time a vast Number of *Nations* and *People* should be brought in to it: So that *Kings* and *Queens* should submit their *Scepters* to that of *Jesus Christ*, and become *Nursing-fathers* and *Nursing-mothers* to his *Church* and *People*.

As for the fulfilling of this *Promise*, especially among us of this Nation, I shall say something by and by. That which
I now

I now desire to take notice of, is the *Terms* by which the Relation between *Christian Princes* and their *People*, is here expressed; *Nursing-fathers* and *Nursing-mothers*.

Let us take these *Terms* in what Sense we will; whether for *natural Parents*, or for those that *supply the Place of Parents* in the taking care of *Children*; that is to say, *Guardians* or *Nurses*; yet the Relation in both these Notions doth imply a wonderful *Trust* reposed in Princes; and a wonderful Care, and Solicitude, and Tenderneſs required of them on the behalf of their *Subjects*.

Kings shall be thy Nursing-fathers, and Queens thy Nursing-mothers. O! if all *Christian Princes* considered this, and looked upon themselves as placed by God on their Thrones, for the making good this Office and Character; with what a Zeal would it inspire them for their Peoples Good?

They would then look upon the whole *Kingdom* as their own *Family*, and concern themselves as much for the Welfare of their *Subjects*, as *Parents* do for their *Children*, or *Guardians* for their *Pupils*.

It would be impossible, upon this Supposition, that ever they should make their own Interests distinct or separate from those of their *People*. How great ſoever their *Powers* or *Prerogatives* were, yet they would never think them well employed, but when

the publick Good was promoted by them. Nor could they propose any other End to themselves in their Government, but to defend those under their Charge, from all Injuncts from Abroad; and to maintain them in Peace at Home, and to make every Soul of them as happy as their Condition will bear.

And for the doing of this, they would think themselves obliged, above all Things, to take Care of the *Church* of God; remembering, that it is chiefly with Respect to *That*, that they have the Charge of being *Nursing-fathers* and *Nursing-mothers*. As such therefore, they would make it their Business to maintain and defend the true *Religion*, to encourage *Piety* and *Virtue*, to oppose and discountenance all *Atheism* and *Infidelity*, all *Heresies* and *Schisms*, and all *Vice* and *Wickedness*, and *Impiety*, of what Nature soever. They would use their utmost Endeavour to make all their Subjects good *Men*, and good *Christians*, as knowing that it is impossible for them to be happy, even in this World, without being so.

And in order to this, they would be sure, in their own *Persons*, to set good Examples to their Subjects, of *Piety* and *Devotion*, of *Temperance* and *Moderation*, and all other Virtues. And they would likewise take Care, as much as in them lay, that all that are about them did the like.

They

They would be continually thinking of that *Psalms* of *David*, which he composed upon his being advanced to the Kingdom of *Israel*, and wherein he declares the Rules he resolved to observe in his Government. It is the *Hundred and First Psalm*, *I will sing, saith he, of Mercy and Judgment; unto thee, O Lord, will I sing. O let me have Understanding in the Way of Godliness. When wilt thou come unto me? I will walk in my House with a perfect Heart. I will take no wicked Thing in hand; I hate the Works of the Unfaithful, no such shall cleave unto me. A froward Heart shall depart from me; I will not know a wicked Person.*—*My Eyes look upon such as are faithful in the Land, that they may dwell with me. Whoso leadeth a godly Life, he shall be my Servant.*—*I shall soon destroy all the Ungodly that are in the Land, that I may root out all wicked Doers from the City of the Lord.*

And as such *Nursing-fathers* and *Nursing-Mothers* as we are speaking of, would thus concern themselves for God and his Religion, and the *Spiritual* Interests of their People; so no less solicitous would they be to secure and promote their *Temporal* Peace and Happiness: And accordingly they would think themselves obliged, as much as they could, to look into the Affairs of the Kingdom with their own

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Eyes; and to see that all the *Magistrates* under them did their Duty in their respective Stations and Offices. They would take Care not to suffer their Favourites to encroach upon them, nor ever to make Use of their Credit with the *Prince* for the oppressing the meanest of the *People*. But they would provide, that *Impartial Justice* should be Administred to all their Subjects; but yet such Justice as is tempered with *Mercy*: Remembering what God hath told them in the Scriptures, that *their Thrones should be upholden by Mercy*.

Prov. xx.
28.

In a Word, As the *Ends* they proposed to themselves in their Government, would be the *Good* of their *People*; so the *Measures* they pitched upon for the Administration of it would be accordingly: That is to say, in such a Constitution as ours, where the People have their fixed *Rights*, and *Liberties* and *Properties*, the standing *Laws* of the Kingdom would always be the *Rule* of their Actions: Nor would they either violate those Laws themselves, nor give any Dispensation, or even Encouragement to others to do it.

O how happy is that People that have such Princes to reign over them! They are out of all Fears of *Despotick* or *Arbitrary* Proceedings. Indeed, *Arbitrariness* is a Word fit for none but *God*; for all his
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Creatures are under *Laws*, by which they must be governed: And yet I think it is an Affront to God to say, that even he himself ever acts *arbitrarily*, in the Sense we commonly use that Word.

God doth, indeed, *whatsoever pleaseth him, both in Heaven and in Earth*. But ^{Pf. cxxxv. 6.} then that Pleasure of his is always governed by the eternal *Laws of Wisdom, and Righteousness, and Goodness*, which are essential to his own Mind.

We may likewise truly say, that God doth all Things, both in Heaven and in Earth, for his own *Glory*; but then that *Glory* doth only consist in the Manifestation of his *Excellencies and Perfections* to his Creatures, and doing them the greatest *Good* they are capable of.

Now such a *Glory* as this, it is allowable to every Man in his Sphere, to be ambitious of; but Princes ought to be so above all others: For by this, they truly imitate God, and make good their Character of being his Representatives upon Earth; a sort of *Gods* among Men, as the Scripture often calls them. And by governing after this Way, they render themselves truly *Glorious*, in being Esteemed, and Loved, and Honoured while they live, and transmitting their Memories, with a grateful Odour, to all succeeding Generations.

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But for the most absolute Princes upon Earth to use their Power for the Oppressing, or doing Hurt to the meanest of Mankind; or to think of advancing their Glory by any other Methods, than by doing all the Good they can to all the World, and especially to their own Subjects; this is being *Arbitrary* in a wicked Sense, and gives such a Notion of *Glory*, as was not known among the Creatures of GOD, till the Revolt of the fallen Angels, from whom some of the corrupted Mass of Mankind, by their Instigation, have since taken it.

But I proceed to my *Second Point*; to speak something of the fulfilling of this Prophecy in my *Text*, of *GOD's raising up Kings and Queens to be our Nursing-fathers and Nursing-mothers.*

And blessed be GOD, this Promise hath, for many Ages, from Time to Time, been made good to abundance of *Nations* and *People*: But to none more amply, more signally, than to us of this *Kingdom.*

As the Christian Faith was Planted here as early, almost, as in any Nation, (for it was Planted here in the Time of the Apostles, and probably by one of them) so, if we may believe our Histories, it was this Country of ours, to which GOD vouchsafed the Honour of having the First

K. Lucius. *Christian King* in *Europe*, and consequently the

the first *Nursing-father*: And likewise the Honour of giving Birth to that *Emperor*, Constantine. who was the first *Nursing-father* to all *Christendom*; so early was this Promise of GOD to his Church fulfilled among us.

It is not likewise a little to the Honour of our Nation, nor a little Argument of GOD's Care over us, that when the *Liberties* of all *Christian Kings* and *People* were invaded and oppressed by the *Papal Usurpations*; and *Christianity* itself was corrupted by *Superstition* and *Idolatry*: It was an *English King* that first threw off the *Foreign Yoke*; and it was an *English King* also, that first begun the *Reformation* of *Religion*.

But the Honour of perfecting that great Work, was reserved for a *Queen*. You all know whom I mean, the Immortal *Elizabeth*, whose Name will be precious, not only in this Nation, but in all the Reformed Countries of *Europe*, as long as Time shall last.

Her Reign alone will let us see, that it was not without great Reason, that in my Text, *Queens* are joined as equal Sharers with *Kings*, in making up the *Blessing* which is here promised to GOD's People.

And such another *QUEEN* we trust GOD has now given us.

We ought, indeed, to admire GOD's Goodness to us: Often have we provoked

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him by our manifold Sins and Impieties. And often hath he punished us for them; But yet in his *Judgments* he hath always remembered *Mercy*: When we have been in our greatest Distresses, he hath always raised up Deliverers to us.

Even then, when our Constitution was not long since (not so long since, but that many here present may remember it) quite subverted by *Factions* at Home; yet in a little Time did he Restore our *Lawful King*, and with him our *Church*, and *Laws*, and *Liberties*.

And when, upon his Death, all of them were again in Danger by a *Faction* from another Quarter; and we had no Prospect but of sinking under the Calamity; yet then he raised up our late *King* and *Queen*, of Glorious Memory, to rescue us from our Dangers, and to secure us in the Possession of all that was dear and valuable to us.

So that, blessed be GOD, we still continue upon the same *Bottom* we were: We have still the same *Religion*, the same *Church*, the same *Government*: We still enjoy the same *Rights* and *Liberties*, and *Properties* that ever we did. O may they for ever be continued to us and our Posterity: And we hope in GOD's Mercy that they will.

For

For tho' it hath pleased him to deprive us of these two great *Blessings*, by taking to himself, first our incomparable QUEEN, and now lately our KING, who was the great Support, not only of these Kingdoms, but of all *Europe*: Yet such is his Goodness, that he hath preserved to us another *Branch* of the same *Royal Stock*, to repair our Losses. *Ramo uno avulso non deficit alter Aureus.*

A Sister of our never-to-be-forgotten QUEEN, is yet left us. Of whom, if we may make Presages, either from the long Experience we have had of her many personal Virtues, expressed in a more private Condition, and particularly her Firmness to the *English Church*, and *English Interest*, in the most difficult Times:

Or from the Instances she has already given, since her Accession to the Throne:

Of her Zeal for the supporting of the common Cause of *Europe*, against the exorbitant Power of *France*:

Of her tender Love to Her People, expressed in such a *Donative*, as is hardly to be parallel'd by any Thing heretofore seen in this Kingdom.

Of Her Concern for our *Religion*, our *Laws*, our *Liberties*; for the Continuance of the Crown in the *Protestant Line*; for the Government in Church and State, as by Law established: All which She has assured
us

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us in Her gracious *Declaration*, and from the *Throne*, are as dear to her, as any *Person* whatsoever; and that no *Pains* or *Diligence* shall ever be wanting on her *Part*, to preserve and maintain them.

Lastly, Of her solemn *Resolution*, (declared in her *Proclamation*) to discountenance and punish all *Manner of Vice*, and *Profaneness* and *Immorality* in all *Persons*, of whatsoever *Degree* or *Quality*; and particularly, in such as are employ'd near Her *Royal Person*. And that, for the greater *Encouragement* of *Religion* and *Morality*, She will, upon all *Occasions*, distinguish *Persons* of *Piety* and *Virtue*, by *Marks* of her *Royal Favour*.

I say, if we may draw good *Omens* from those former *Experiences* of her Majesty's *Life*, and from these auspicious *Beginnings* of her *Reign*, there is just *Reason* for us all to congratulate with the whole *Kingdom*, the happy *Prospect* we have, that *God*, in setting Her upon the *Throne*, hath again fulfilled his *Promise* in my *Text*; hath given us, in Her, another *Nursing-Mother* to his *Church* and *People*; and one who will make good that *Character*, in all the *Instances* I have before mentioned.

What have we now to do, but to thank *God* heartily for all the repeated *Instances* of his *Favour* to us, and particularly this last one. And to pray earnestly for Her Majesty,

jeſty, that her following Reign may be ſuitable to theſe happy Beginnings.

But in order to theſe Prayers being effectual, there is ſomething required of us, which is fit here to be mentioned, as being a natural Application of what I have already ſaid.

And that is, That we take Care not to hinder or obſtruct the happy Effects of Her Maſteſty's gracious Intentions to her People, by any unbecoming Carriage of ours: But always bear in Mind what Returns of *Duty*, and *Gratitude*, and *filial Obedience*, this Conſideration of the Queen's being a *Nurſing-Mother to her People*, doth call for from us, and all other her Subjects.

This is the *Third*, and laſt Thing, I propoſed to ſpeak to, but for fear of being too long, I ſhall but juſt touch upon it.

If all Subjects did ſeriously conſider this Relation between their *Princes* and *them*, they would think themſelves obliged to bear the ſame *Love* and *Affection*, to pay the ſame *Honour* and *Reverence* and *Obedience* to their *Nurſing-Fathers* and *Nurſing-Mothers*, as they do to their *Natural Parents*.

They would endeavour to make their Reigns as eaſy as was poſſible, by contributing, every Man in his Sphere, what Aſſiſtance they could to their Prince, for the promoting the common Good.

I

They

They would make it their Study to live in as much Peace and Unity with their Fellow-Subjects, as if they dwelt together in one Family.

They would have no *Interests* separate from the *Common-wealth*; nor would they, for the advancing themselves, ever seek the Ruin of others.

They would not, for Difference in Opinion, about the Methods of the publick Conduct, break out into *Parties* and *Factions*: Much less, in Case of such Divisions, would they sacrifice the *Peace* of the *Kingdom*, to their own private *Resentments*, and mingle Heaven and Earth for the supporting of a Side.

They would seriously remember the Caution which St. *Paul* hath given us, and which indeed concerns every one of this Nation, but especially those that are concerned in the publick Management, often to think of. *If* (saith he) *ye bite and devour one another, have a Care that ye be not consumed one of another.* Nothing can ever so much endanger this Kingdom as our own Divisions. And if ever we be ruin'd, in all Probability, it is these will be the Cause of it.

It is one very good *Omen* (among the rest that I have mentioned) of her Majesty's happy Reign, that no Prince ever came to the Throne with a more general Satisfaction, and with more good Wishes of the People.

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And it must be said, to the Honour of this *Parliament*, that never any *Parliament* gave more extraordinary Testimonies of their sincere Affection and Duty, and Kindness to their Prince, than this *Parliament* hath given to the *Queen*.

O may this good Understanding, these mutual Endearments between the *Queen* and Her *People*, for ever continue. And abhorred be the Memory of that Man, that makes the first Step towards the breaking of them.

Then shall we be happy: As happy as the Vicissitudes of this World will allow us to be. And as the *Queen* will rejoice in her *People*; so it will be Her *Peoples* daily Prayer, that God would long, long preserve *Queen ANNE*.



S E R-

SERMON V.

Preached before the

QUEEN

A T

St. JAMES's Chapel,

On *Ash-wednesday*, February 10. 170 $\frac{1}{2}$.

HEB. ii. 3.

*How shall we escape, if we neglect
so great Salvation.*

TO shew the Meaning of this Text,
and the Use we are to put it to,
there needs no more to be done,
than to enquire what is here meant by *Sal-
vation*: And then, *Secondly*, Upon what
Occasion these Words come in, and what
was the *Apostle's* Design in them.

As

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III

As to the *First, Salvation*, in its general Sense, imports any great Deliverance from *Evil* or *Danger*. Thus God's conducting the *Israelites* through the *Red-Sea*, and drowning the *Egyptians*, is called *God's Salvation*, *Exod. xiv. 13*. Thus the Deliverance of the *Israelites* out of the Hands of the *Philistines*, is called *a great Salvation*, *1 Sam. xiv. 45*. And indeed this is the usual Sense of the Word throughout the Old Testament. But now, because the greatest of all *Evils* and *Dangers* which Mankind are obnoxious to; are those that are occasioned by their *Sins*; therefore is the Word *Salvation*, by way of Eminence, appropriated to that *Deliverance*, which our Lord *Jesus Christ* wrought for Mankind, from their *Sins* and the *Punishment* of them. So that our *Salvation*, in the *New Testament* Sense, is the same Thing with our *Redemption* by *Christ Jesus*. *Christ* came to be our *Saviour*, and that *Redemption* he wrought for us, is our *Salvation*. And as many Parts or Branches as there go to the making up that *Redemption*; so many Parts and Branches there go to the making up our *Salvation*.

This, now, is that *Salvation* my Text speaks of; only with this Difference, that by an usual Figure, the Apostle here puts *Salvation* for the *Doctrine of Salvation*, or that *Gospel* of *Christ* which tenders this *Salvation* to Mankind; as appears by what fol-

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follows in the Verse; *How shall we escape, if we neglect so great Salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him?* Now what *Salvation* could that be, which was *first spoken by our Lord*, and confirmed by the Apostles that heard him, but the *Doctrine*, or the *Gospel* of this *Salvation* which they preached?

As for the other Thing; the *Connection* of this *Text* with what goes before, and the *Design* that is here pursued, it lies thus; the *Apostle* begins this Chapter with an *Exhortation*, by way of *Inference* from his former *Discourse*. *We ought therefore* (saith he) *to give the more earnest Heed to the Thing we have heard*, (that is, the *Doctrine* of the *Gospel* he had been recommending to them) *lest at any Time we let them slip*. In the next *Verse*, he gives a *Reason* why they ought to be so *regardful* of these Things: *Because* (says he) *if the Word spoken by Angels was stedfast, and every Transgression and Disobedience receiv'd a just Recompence of Reward, how shall we escape, if we neglect so great Salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, &c.* That is to say; If the *Old Law*, the *Law of Moses*, which was delivered only by *Angels*, was of so great *Authority*, that God would not permit any wilful *Transgression* of it to go without a severe *Punishment*: How shall we escape, if we neglect

glect or despise the *New Law* of the *Gospel*; the *Doctrine* of so great a *Salvation*, as is delivered to us by no less a Person than the Son of God, and confirmed to us by his *Apostles*, who were Witnesses of what he did and taught.

The Text then, you see, is brought in as a Motive or Argument to enforce the Apostle's Exhortation in the Beginning of the Chapter: And I do not know how I can better serve the Ends of this Day's Meeting, than by making use of it to the same Purpose.

My Business, at this Time, is to call upon all that hear me, to employ this present Season that we are now entering upon, in the *Examining* the State of their Souls, and *Repenting* of their Sins past, and turning to God with all their Hearts, by seriously applying themselves to the Work of *Religion*, if they have hitherto neglected it: And all this in order to the attaining those Benefits, that *Salvation* which is made over to all true *Penitents*, by the Gospel of *Jesus Christ*. Now what better Method can I use to prevail upon any of you to put this in practice, than by endeavouring to convince you of your utter *Inexcusableness*, and the *Impossibility* of your escaping, if you do not? And further, what better Argument can I pitch upon, for the convincing you of this *Inexcusableness*, this *Impossibility* of your escaping;

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than that which here the Apostle lays so much weight upon, namely, the *Greatness* of that *Salvation* which you despise, so long as you continue in a State of *Impenitence*? *How shall we escape, saith he, if we neglect so great Salvation?* This single Point, when put into a true Light, carries in it so many Obligations and Engagements to make us all forsake our sinful Courses, and to lead Holy and Religious Lives, that where it is duly considered, it can hardly fail of producing that Effect. This Point therefore, I beg leave at this Time to insist upon, and to apply it, with all the Plainness and Earnestness I can, to the aforesaid Purposes.

Now, the *Greatness* of this *Salvation* which the Gospel tenders to us, I shall here consider in these *Two* Particulars. *First*, The *Greatness* of the *Blessings* contained in it. *Secondly*, The *Greatness* of the *Encouragements* we have to set about it: Upon both which Accounts it will appear, that we are infinitely *inexcusable*, so long as we continue to *neglect* it.

I. I begin with the *First* Head, The *Greatness* of the *Salvation* itself, which our Lord *Jesus* has made over to us; or the great *Blessings* it containeth in it. In which Respect we have just Reason to cry out, *How shall we escape, if we neglect so great a Salvation?*

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The *Salvation* of *Christ* is not like that of *Moses*, or *Joshua*, or *Gideon*, a *Temporary*, *Secular* one; a delivering of us out of the *Slavery* of *Egypt*; or a putting us into a peaceable Possession of a Land *flowing with Milk and Honey*; or a saving us from the *Invasions* and *Oppressions* of our *Enemies*: Though these are great *Salvations*, and are celebrated as such in the *Old Testament*; and it is a *Salvation* of this Nature, that the *Jews* do yet expect from their *Messiah*: But it is a Thing infinitely greater and more *desirable*.

The *Salvation* which *Christ* purchased, and the Gospel tenders to every Creature, is a Comprehension of the richest *Blessings* that God can bestow, and a *Deliverance* from the greatest *Evils* that Mankind can suffer. It contains in it all that can make the Nature of Man perfect, or the State of his Life *happy*; and frees him from all that either doth or can render his Condition *miserable*. Indeed, the *Blessings* of it are great beyond all Imagination. *Eye hath* ^{1 Cor. ii.} *not seen, nor Ear heard, neither did en-* ^{9.} *ter into the Heart of Man the Things, which God hath prepared for them that love him.*

For, in the *First Place*, To be *saved*, as *Christ* came to save all the World, is to have all our Sins forgiven; all our numberless Iniquities and Transgressions blotted out;

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all those heavy Loads of Guilt which oppressed our Souls, and might even justly sink them into Desperation, quite removed from our Minds.

It is to be reconciled to God, and restored to his Favour and Friendship; so that he shall be no longer a *consuming Fire*, no longer an angry, terrible, revenging God, but a most kind, compassionate, and tender-hearted *Father* to us.

It is to be at Peace with *him*, and at Peace with our own *Consciences*; and to have a Title to his peculiar Love, and Care, and Protection all the Days of our Lives.

Again, *Secondly*, to be saved as Christ came to save the World, is to be rescued from the cruelest Bondage of our cruelest Enemies; from the *Dominion of Sin*, and the *Tyranny of the Devil*.

It is to be translated out of the Power of Darkness into the Kingdom of our dear Lord; so that *Sin shall reign no longer in our mortal Bodies*, but *we shall serve God in the Newness of the Spirit*.

It is to be asserted into a State of true *Freedom and Liberty*: So that we shall be no longer under the controul of blind *Passions*; or be hurried on by our impetuous *Lusts* to do those Things, which our own Reason doth condemn; but be in such a Condition, that we can dispose of ourselves according to our own *Desires*, and our *De-*
sires

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fires shall be always such as are fit and becoming a reasonable Nature.

It is to have a new *Principle of Life* infused into us; by the Means of which, we shall not only live up to the Perfection of the *Human Nature*, but be made Partakers of the *Divine*.

It is to become the *Temples* of the *Holy Spirit*, to have him as a perpetual Guest and Lodger in our Hearts; whose Holy Fire will consume all our Dross and Impurity; whose comfortable Influences will always cheer and refresh us, and whose wise Counsels will always advise, direct, and govern us.

In a Word, it is to live like GOD, to be transformed into his *Image*, and to be made like unto him in *Wisdom*, and *Righteousness*, and *Purity*, and all other Perfections which the Nature of Man is capable of.

Furthermore, in the *Third Place*, To be saved, as *Christ* came to save us, is to be delivered from the Wrath to come; from that dreadful Vengeance, which shall one Day overtake all the World.

When the *Heavens* shall pass away with ^{1 Pet. iii.}
a crackling Noise of Fire; and the *Elements* ^{10.}
shall melt with fervent Heat; the *Earth*
also, and all the Works that are therein,
shall be burnt up.

When the Lord shall descend from Heaven ^{1 Thes. ii.}
with a mighty Shout, with ten thousands of ^{16.}

2 Thes. i. *his Angels, to take Vengeance in flaming*
 8. *Fire, upon all ungodly Men, for all the un-*
 Jude x 15. *godly Deeds which they have unrighteously*
committed.

When all Men, both *small* and *great*,
dead and *living*, shall be summoned to
 appear before a dreadful and impartial
Tribunal, and give an Account of all their
Actions.

When the *Greatest* and the most *Prospe-*
rous Sinners that the *Sun* ever *shone* upon,
 shall *tremble* and *sneak*, and be *confounded*,
 and should think themselves happy, if they
 could *hide* themselves in the *Dens* of the
Mountains: When they shall say to the
Rocks, *Fall on us*, and *cover us* from the *Face*
of him that sitteth upon the Throne, and
 from the *Wrath* of the *Lamb*, whose *Sal-*
vation we have despised.

I say, from this dreadful *Day* of *Wrath*,
 and all those amazing *Terrors* that do at-
 tend it; and which are but the due *Portion*
 of them that do Evil, doth *Christ's* *Salva-*
tion, and *his* only, set us free.

But neither is this the greatest *Blessing*
 that is contained in this *Salvation*. For,
 in the *Last* Place, To be *saved* as *Christ*
 came to save the World, is after a *Holy*,
 and a *Heavenly*, and in some measure a
Happy Life in this World, to be translated
 into a State of *Endless* *Happiness* in ano-
 ther World,

Never

Never to die any more; never to suffer the Uneasiness and Infirmities of an earthly *Body* any more; never to know *Pain* or *Sickness*, *Grief* and *Sorrow*, *Labour* and *Weariness*, *Disquiet* or *Vexation* any more: But to live in perfect *Ease* and *Peace*; in perfect *Freedom* and *Liberty*; in a perfect Enjoyment of *ourselves*, and the greatest *Good* we can be Partakers of, and that in the most perfect Way for ever and ever.

It is to have our *Bodies*, that slept in the Dust, raised again, re-united to our *Souls*: But no longer *Gross*, *Earthly*, *Corruptible* Bodies, but *Spiritual*, *Heavenly*, *Immortal* ones, *fashioned like unto Christ's Glorious Body*, in the which he now *sits* at the Right Hand of God.

It is to live in the *City* of the Great King, the *Heavenly Jerusalem*, a Country of perpetual *Light* and *Bliss*, where the *Glory* of the Lord doth fill the Place; and, where every Object that presents itself, adds a new *Beauty*, and contributes to the Increase of the Delight.

It is to spend an *Eternity* in the most noble and agreeable Employments: In viewing and contemplating the wonderful Works of God; in admiring the wise Contrivances of his Providence in all Ages; in adoring his infinite Love to the Sons of Men; in reflecting upon our own inexpressible Happiness, that ariseth from his Communica-

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tions to us; and in singing everlasting *Hymns* of *Praise*, and *Joy*, and *Triumph* to *God*, and our Lord *Jesus*, upon account of all these Things.

It is to dwell for ever in a Place, where there are no Objects of *Pity* or *Compassion*, of *Anger* or *Envy*, of *Hatred* or *Distrust*: Every Person there being as happy as he desires, and all increasing the Happiness of one another, by their mutual Kindnesses and Endearments.

It is to converse with the most delightful Company in the World; to be restored to the Society of all our dear *Friends* and *Relations* that died in the Faith of *Christ*, and to have an Acquaintance with all the great Souls, whose illustrious *Virtues* and *Atchievements* made them famous in their Generations.

Lastly, It is to be with *Jesus Christ*, and to behold his *Glory*; and to live for ever in seeing and enjoying the Great *God*, in whose Presence is the fulness of *Joy*, and at whose Right Hand there are Pleasures for evermore.

This is the *Salvation*, which *Christ* hath purchased for us. This is the *Salvation*, which is offered to all Mankind in the Gospel: And now have we not great Reason to cry out with the Apostle, *How shall we escape, if we neglect so great Salvation?*

Can

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Can any Thing be said in Excuse for such a Wretch, as being convicted of grievous Crimes, and thereupon justly sentenced to suffer *Death* for them; yet through the powerful Intercession of the *Prince* with his *Father*, hath not only a *Pardon* offered him, but *Preferment* and *Honour*, and the *Favour* of his Sovereign; doth yet, nevertheless, stand out against these Overtures, and despiseth these undeserved Bounties, and chuseth rather to die miserably, than to live happily? I say, What can be said in Excuse for such an unaccountable Madness as this? Who can pity such a *stupid Fool*, that will thus, against all Sense and Reason, *undo* himself?

Why, *Brethren*, this is just our Case. In as bad a Condition are all of us, by reason of our Offences against Heaven, as this condemned Malefactor, or rather in a much worse: For the worst of his Punishment is but *Temporal* Death; but *Spiritual* Death, and all the horrid Consequences thereof, are the deserved Wages, the just Recompence of our Transgressions.

But so infinitely *kind* is our GOD to us, that through the *Mediation* of his Son *Jesus*, he is willing not to take these Advantages against us; nay, he offers a Pardon of all our Sins; nay, not only so, but he offers his *Love*, his *Friendship*, his *Favour*, which is *better than Life itself*. He offers
to

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to advance us into the nearest Relation with himself; to be the *Children* of the *most High*; to be the *Brethren* of our Lord *Jesus*; to be *Kings* and *Priests* with his own *Son*, and *Heirs* together with him, of an *eternal Inheritance* in the Heavens, of a *Crown of Glory* that *fadeth not away*.

Is it not now the extremest Stupidity in the World, not to close with these gracious Tenders? To be so in love with *Sin* and *Misery*, to be so fond of *Chains* and *Darkness*, as to despise these unspeakable Blessings, which Heaven holds forth to us?

O *Blessed God*! That *Thou* shouldst be so rich in Mercy, so abundant in Kindness and Love, as to propose the most inestimable Treasures of thy Grace and Favour to the Acceptance of every Human Creature; and that yet most of us should be so foolish, or so wretched, as to take little notice of them!

But we, *shallow* Things as we are, are *bewitched* with this present World. A few *painted Bubbles* do so hold our *Eyes*, that we cannot look up to those *glorious*, invaluable *Gems*, that are so fairly presented before us.

O the base degenerate Spirits of Mankind! That they should be contented to lead the *Life of Brutes* (and it would be well

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well if they could *die* like them too) when it is in their Power to live like *Angels*, and *God* himself!

That they should with Patience endure the Vassalage of the Devil, and a Thousand Lusts as *Impure* and *Tyrannical* as he; when they may enjoy the most glorious *Liberty of the Sons of God*!

That they should chuse to spend their Days in *Vanity* and *Emptiness*, in *Folly* and *Misery*, in *fanciful Satisfaction*s, but in *real Care* and *Sorrow*; and after all this, reap nothing but Anguish, and Woe, and Confusion for ever; when they may both live happily here (God, even in this World, requiting them for all the Pains and Trouble they undergo for his sake) and, in the World to come, be the *noblest*, the most glorious Beings that Words can express, or the Mind of Man conceive of!

O if we would sit down, and give our selves leave calmly to ponder these Things, how would it be possible for us to lead such Lives as many of us do? How would it be possible for us to live loosely and carelessly without God, without any Sense of Religion, wholly minding the Gratification of our *Brutish*, or our *Worldly* Inclinations? These Arguments are of such Force, that it is hard for *human Nature* to stand out against them, if they be vigorously applied to the Mind.

If

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If we did heartily believe, and seriously consider what the present Life is, and what will come after: If we did sedately weigh the infinite Disproportion between a *Moment* and *Eternity*, and what a very Trifle, even the greatest *Businesses*, the greatest *Enjoyments*, and the greatest *Sufferings* in this World, must needs be thought in comparison with the *eternal Weight of Glory*, or that *everlasting Shame and Confusion of Face* that will be hereafter:

I say, If we did in good Earnest attend to these Things, we could scarce avoid the finding a strange and speedy Alteration in ourselves: We should perceive new *Thoughts*, new *Desires*, new *Designs* and *Resolutions* to arise in our Minds.

We should, with the greatest Passion, cry out, Let us be happy in the next World, and then let what will become of us in this. Deal with us here, *O Lord*, as thou plearest, *scourge* us, *afflict* us, *punish* us, dispose us into what Circumstances thou wilt, let us but reign with *Christ* hereafter, and we have enough.

Were our Minds once seriously affected with these Things, all the *Great*, and the *Rich*, and the *Gay* Things of this World, which usually carry such *Magick* in them, would look so contemptibly, as that we should be amazed at ourselves, ever to have had so little Judgment, as once to have put the Question, Whether for their
fakes

sakes we should lose our Innocence, and the Peace of our Mind, and forfeit our Title to the Favour of GOD.

O with what noble Thoughts and Resolutions would the Hopes of living for ever with our Lord *Jesus* in his *Glory*, inspire us! How *regular* would it make us in all our Conversation! How diligent in the Mortification of our Lusts and evil Habits! How strict and solemn in the Exercise of Devotion! How serious and constant in the Profession of *Christ's* Religion! And how solicitous above all Things to keep a good Conscience, and to do nothing inconsistent with our Duty, for the serving any Ends whatsoever!

II. But I have dwelt too long upon this Head. I pass on to the other general Point which I mentioned, touching the *Greatness of this Salvation*; and which will still farther extremely aggravate our Neglect of it: And that is, *The Greatness of the Encouragement we have given us to set about it*. In this respect also we have Reason to cry out, *How shall we escape, if we neglect so great Salvation?*

Now, under this Head, of the *Encouragements* that God hath given every *Christian*, to apply himself to obtaining this *Salvation*, I shall insist on these *three Particulars*.

First, The *Easiness* of the *Terms*, upon which he offers it.

Secondly,

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Secondly, His *Readiness* to accept even the *greatest Sinners* that will set themselves about it.

Thirdly, The great *Assistances* he doth afford, for the obtaining of it. Of each of these very briefly.

And *First* of all, Let us put the Text thus. How shall we escape, if we neglect so great Salvation; *which may be had upon such easy Terms?*

It is true, God, when he proposes *Salvation* to us in the Gospel, dealeth with us as a *Master* doth with his *Servants*; we must do some *Work* before we have our *Wages*: If, indeed, *Salvation* can in any Sense be called *Wages*, and not rather the *gratuitous Bounty* of God; since there is no Proportion at all between the Work we do, and the Reward we receive for that Work. But some Work we must do, and therefore we are bid to *work out our Salvation*. Some Services are to be performed on our Parts, otherwise we are not to expect to *enter into our Master's Joy*.

But then, so infinitely kind a Master we have, and so *Noble*, so *Rational*, so *Ingenious* a Service he hath put upon us; that the very *Easiness* of his *Terms* will be one of the blackest Aggravations of our Baseness and inexcusable Guilt, in refusing his *Salvation*.

If

If the Conditions that God requireth of us, had been such as are represented in the Sixth of *Micah*, where the *Prophet* brings in a Man speaking after this Manner: *Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the Most High God? Will the Lord be pleased with Thousands of Rams, or Ten thousand Rivers of Oil? Or shall I give my First-born for my Transgression, the Fruit of my Body for the Sin of my Soul?* I say, if the Terms of recommending ourselves to God had been such as these, we had had some Reason to complain of the *Severity* of them; and consequently some *Excuse* for our not being so forward to set upon that *Salvation* which was promised upon them: They being neither *good* in themselves, nor *practicable* to the most. For at this rate, none but very *rich* or very *cruel hard-hearted Men* could be supposed to go to Heaven.

But when, as the *Prophet* goes on, God hath commanded us only *those Things that are good*. And *what doth the Lord require of us, but to do justly, to love Mercy, and to walk humbly with our God?* I say, since this is our Case, what *Excuse* can be made for that Man, that will not purchase *Everlasting Salvation* at so easy a Price as this?

Certain it is, that the *Terms* of our future Happiness, as they are proposed by
our

our Saviour, are made up of Duties, which are of *themselves* so agreeable to the *Make* and *Frame* of our *Nature*; do so highly tend to the Improvement and Perfection of our *Faculties*; nay, and are so needful to our *Happiness* and Well-being in this World; that we must of Necessity, if we would not be *miserable*, have imposed them as a *Law* upon our selves, though G O D had not obliged us to them. And can it be accounted hard Usage in G O D, to promise *eternal Rewards* to the doing of those Things, which we should have thought reasonable to be done, though no such *Rewards* had been promised?

Are we not very hardly dealt with, think you, to have all the Glories of Heaven offered to us upon such Conditions as these? That we will live up to the Dignity of our Natures, that we will lead the Life of *Men*, and not of *Brute Creatures*; and that we will endeavour in this World, to make our Being as happy as we can, by the Practice of *Virtue* and *Righteousness*. And yet these are the Terms, upon which G O D hath offered Salvation to Mankind in the Gospel. O wonderful Severity! O heavy Burdens, not to be endured upon our Shoulders!

What shall we say to the Perverseness of sensual Men? The greatest *Pleasures* that are to be had on Earth, are so *terrible* to them, that for their Sakes they dare
not

not cast a Look towards the Happiness of *Heaven*. Such *Self-denying* Creatures they are, that rather than be as *happy* as is possible in this World, they will venture *eternal Misery* in the World to come.

How is it possible to lay a surer Foundation for *Ease* and *Peace*, and the *Enjoyment* of our *selves* in all States and Conditions of Life, than to have a hearty Sense of God's *Presence* and *Goodness*? to *love* Him, who is the most *lovely* Object in the World; to believe his *Revelations*, who is *Truth* itself; to *depend* upon him in all our *Necessities*; and to *rejoice* continually in the Expressions of his *Kindness* and *Bounty* to us: To procure to our selves as *many Friends*, and as *few Enemies* as is possible, by being *true*, and *faithful*, and *just* in our Dealings, and exercising *Meekness*, and *Charity*, and *Kindness*, and *Forgiveness* to all Men; to live in a *sober* and *moderate* Use of all the good Things of this Life; to keep our *Passions* and *Appetites* within such Bounds, as shall neither disturb our *Health*, nor our *Understandings*, nor the *Ease* and *Quiet* of our *Minds*. In a Word, to govern our selves, and all our Actions, by the Laws of the best and most perfect Reason.

What, I say, can be more natural, or more delightful? Or, what can more contribute to a *comfortable* and *happy* Life in this

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World, than the Practice of these Things? And yet these are the *dreadful Burthens* that *Christ* has laid upon us: These are the *terrible Bugbears* that fright us from endeavouring after that *everlasting Salvation* which he offers to us in the Gospel.

I know it will be said, That *Repentance* and *Mortification*, and disengaging our selves from *vicious Habits*, which is necessary to be done in order to *Salvation*, are not such *delightful Things*; but are very *uneasy* and *troublesome*. I answer, So is *Physick* very *troublesome* and *uneasy* to a *sick Man*; but when it has perform'd its Effects, then *Health* and *Joy* succeeds in the Place of it.

But besides, As the Hardship of these Duties lasts but a very little while, so even during the Time it doth last, a Man's Life is much more easy and comfortable, than while he lived a *Slave* to his *Lusts*, and was perpetually haunted with an evil *Conscience*. And this every Man in the World, that ever tried, must needs acknowledge; *Religion*, even when its Severities are the greatest (which is at the Entrance of it) yet yields more *Peace*, and *Happiness*, and *Satisfaction*, than a Life that is led without it.

So that, upon the Consideration of the whole Matter, the *Terms*, upon which *Christ* hath promised this *great Salvation*, must be acknowledged so highly *reasonable*, so extremely *easy*, that there will be no *Pre-*
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tence of *Excuse* left for that Man, no *Possibility* of his *Escaping*, that doth neglect it.

Especially, if we add to this, in the *Second Place*, *The Universality with which it is offer'd*.

It is tender'd most seriously and affectionately to all Sorts of Men: None are excluded; no, not the greatest Sinners. How bad soever our Lives have formerly been; how much soever our Consciences are oppressed with the Guilt of Sin; yet if we will close with our Saviour's *Terms* (and very *easy* ones you see they are) he is ready to bestow his *Salvation* upon us. This also is another Consideration, which as it gives us the greatest Encouragement to set about this Work, so it will make us appear still more *inexcusable* and *unpitiab*le, if we do not. How shall we escape, if we neglect a *Salvation which is tender'd so freely, so unreservedly to all Sinners* (even the greatest) *without Exception*?

It is a Sense of *Guilt* that oftentimes makes Men more *guilty*. It is Despair of Mercy that often stops up the Way to Amendment, and carries Men on to still more wicked and desperate Courses: But to have *Hopes*, nay, to have *Assurance* of Forgiveness and Mercy, must needs sure have quite other Effects.

For the Great G O D to proclaim his general *Pardon* to all his *rebellious Creatures*;

may, not only so, but to *entreat* them, to *beseech* them to accept of it, promising withal his *Favour* and *eternal Life* if they do; sure this kind Usage is able to melt any ingenuous Mind into the most willing and hearty Submissions: Sure he must be a strange kind of Creature, that is not won by so much Goodness, to lay aside his *Enmity* against *Heaven*, and reconcile himself to his *GOD*, shall I say? or to his tender-hearted *Father*.

O my Brethren! to consider the *strange, surprizing, unexpected* Mercy that is made over to *Sinners* in the Gospel; how ought it to affect us? How ought it to arouse the most *stupid, insensible* Mortals, and inflame them with a Desire of returning to their *gracious GOD*, from whom they have so long wandered in the Mazes of *Folly* and *Sin*?

It is not only the *Righteous* and *Innocent* that shall have Benefit by the Blood of *Christ*; those that thro' a good *Education*, and a virtuous *Disposition*, have, in a great Measure, *escaped the Pollutions of the World*, and have all their Lives long given up themselves to the Service of *Jesus Christ*: I say, 'tis not to these only that the Mercies of the Gospel are extended (though, of all others, these are the most happy People) but the Gate is open, even to the *prodigal Children*, those that have *wasted all their Father's Substance in Lewdness,*

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ness, and riotous Living : Even *these* the Father is ready to receive with open Arms, if they can but have the Heart to return to him.

O, hearken to this, and consider it, all you (if there be any such Persons here) that have hitherto lived loosely and carelessly; that have never minded G O D and his Religion, but have pursued a Course of *Vice*, and *Sensuality*, and *Wickedness* all your Lives long; that have given the Reins to your *brutish* Passions and Appetites, and have, with a *high Hand*, affronted and provoked the Majesty of Heaven and Earth by your repeated Transgressions.

Yet, as *bad* as you are; as *loudly* as your Sins do cry to Heaven for Vengeance, your Case is not desperate, if you can *repent*.

Desperate, did I say? The *Gate* of *Mercy* is open to you, the great G O D waits for you, and is ready to receive and embrace you.

Christ Jesus shed his Blood for *you*, even for *you*; and begs, and entreats you to come and partake of the Benefits thereof.

The *Angels* of G O D do wish for your *Conversion*, and there will be *Joy* in *Heaven* at the News of it.

And all this, We that are the Ministers of *Christ's* Gospel, have Authority from him to publish and declare to you;

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and therefore we do beseech you, in Christ's Stead, that you would be reconciled unto God.

It is not yet too late; you may yet be everlastingly happy, if you will consider and turn: Christ yet offers you his Salvation.

Isa. i. 16, 18. The Lord himself speaks to you: *Wash you, make you clean, put away the Evil of your Doings from before my Eyes; cease to do Evil, learn to do well. And then, though your Sins be as Scarlet, they shall be as white as Snow; though they be red like Crimson, they shall be as Wooll.*

O my Brethren! Having these kind Invitations; having these reviving Hopes, these Assurances of God's Mercy; why should any of us be wicked any longer? Why should we go on a Step farther towards our own Undoing? Why should we not presently break loose from our Sins, and go whither our gracious God so lovingly calls us, to his Mercy, to his Favour, to our own everlasting Salvation?

But if, after all these astonishing Overtures of Grace and Goodness, you still harden your Hearts, and neglect this great Salvation, be you yourselves Judges, whether you shall deserve any Favour, any Pity or Compassion, when you come most to need it, and when in the Anguish of your Souls you bitterly cry out for it.

O! it will be a *stinging* Consideration one Day, to think of the *Greatness* of that *Mercy* that you do now reject: To think *how often* God called you, but you refused: How often he *stretched forth his Hand*, to have kept you from that *Destruction* you were so eagerly pursuing, but you did not regard him: How often he would have gathered you to him, as a *Hen* gathereth her *Chickens* under her *Wings*, but ye would not.

Then will you *sadly wish* that you had, in this your *Day*, understood the *Things* that belong to your *Peace*: But it will be too late, they will then be *hid* from your *Eyes*.

But, *Thirdly*, and *Lastly*, to conclude: Our *Neglect* of Christ's *Salvation* will still appear more *criminal* and *inexcusable*, if we consider the *Encouragement* we have to set about it, upon Account of the *great Assurances* that God is ready to afford us for the obtaining of it.

It is natural for Men, when they are beaten out of other *Excuses*, to fetch *Apolo- gies* for their *Neglect* or *Slothfulness* in any *Business* that is press'd upon them, from the *Greatness* of the *Work*, and their own *Want of Strength* and *Ability* to go through it. And here it is, that the *Sensual* and *Careless* among us, notwithstanding what has been hitherto represented, will be apt to take *Refuge*.

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Tho' *Heaven* (say they) be a *glorious* Place, and the Way to it plainly enough described; yet it is a very *long Journey*, and we must expect to meet with many *Difficulties* in it. Whatever you talk of the *Reasonableness* and the *Easiness* of that Course of Life that leads to it; yet we find, by our own Trials, that it is very hard for *Flesh* and *Blood* to live after that Rate of *Strictness*.

The *Temptations* to Sin are every where so many, and so powerful; and our own *strength* for the resisting of them, so little and inconsiderable; that we may in some Measure be excused, if we be not so forward in the Undertaking, or so successful in the managing of such an Affair as this.

But O, how vain are these Allegations! as if you had no Supports against these Discouragements; but *Christ* had left you to work out your Salvation entirely by your own Strength. Do but cast your Eyes upwards, and look at the mighty Succours, which *Christ Jesus* holds forth to you; and you will confess, that were those *Weaknesses* you complain of, those *Difficulties* you have to conflict with, much more considerable than they are; yet they are not to be accounted of, they are not to be named, being so exceedingly overbalanced by those divine *Powers* and *Aids* which *God* will
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derive upon you, if you will seriously engage in this Work.

Christ Jesus hath not only purchased a Kingdom for you, and taught you the Way to arrive to it, but he hath purchased the *Holy Spirit*, to be your continual Assistant in your Way thither.

He hath not only set you a glorious Example, and bid you to follow him, but he hath sent down the *Holy Ghost*, as his Vicegerent upon Earth, to conduct you to that blessed Place where He is.

You have the *Grace* and the *Presence* of the *Living God* always ready at Hand, if you seriously pray for it, to strengthen your *Weaknesses*, to assist your *Endeavours*, to enlighten your *Minds*, to fortify your *Wills*, to excite your *Affections*, to support you under all *Temptations*, and, in a Word, to fight all the Lord's *Battles* with you; provided you be *sincere* and *honest* in the Prosecution of that glorious *Warfare*, which God hath called you out into.

What can you desire more than this? God hath promised, That *He will never leave you, nor forsake you*. You are assured ^{Heb, xiii. 5.} by his *Apostle*, That *greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the World*. And ^{1 John iv. 4.} another *Apostle* doubts not to affirm, That ^{Rem. viii. 38, 39.} *Nothing shall be able to separate you from the Love of God, which is in Christ Jesus; neither Death, nor Life, nor Angels, nor*
Princi-

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Principalities, nor Powers, nor Things present, nor Things to come, nor Height, nor Depth, nor any other Creature. Nothing under Heaven, except your selves, can do you any Mischief.

And now, this being our Case, what must be said of us, if we be not *Virtuous* and *Happy*? How shall we think to *escape*, if we neglect a *Salvation*, for the obtaining of which we have such mighty *Succours* and *Assistance* afforded to us?

O let these Considerations *fire* us into *brave* and *worthy* Thoughts! Let us make no more vain Excuses: Let us no longer pretend I know not what Difficulties; but let us cheerfully and resolvedly apply our selves to the working out our Salvation; knowing, That *as it is God which worketh in us the Will, so the same God will also work in us the Power of doing it.*

We have no reason to be *afraid* of any Thing, to be *discouraged* at any Thing; for *God Almighty* is with us; *God Almighty*, that made us, still takes Care of us; and is ready for ever to assist all his faithful Servants in all their Extremities.

Christ Jesus, our *High Priest*, sits at the Right Hand of *GOD*, and continually makes Intercession for us.

The *Holy Spirit* never fails to vouchsafe his Presence in the Souls of all well-disposed Persons, to carry them thro' all
Dangers

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Dangers, through all Difficulties, through all Temptations.

In a Word, we need fear nothing, so long as we *design* and *resolve* well, and *endeavour* to do well; for both *Father, Son,* and *Holy Ghost* have engaged themselves in the *Salvation* of all such Persons. *To which Eternal God, &c.*



S E R-

SERMON VI.

Preached before the

QUEEN

A T

St. *JAMES*'s Chapel,

On *Good-Friday*, March 26, 1703.

LUKE xxii. 19.

—*This do in Remembrance of me.*

I Hope it will not be thought unseasonable, if on *this Day*, on which our Saviour *suffer'd*, I entertain you with a Discourse of that *Holy Sacrament*, which was on purpose instituted by him, for the *Commemoration* of those his *Sufferings*: For as this Argument will lead me to treat of most of those Things which are the proper Subjects of our Meditations at this Time; so, considering that all of us who are religiously

giouſly diſpoſed, are preparing ourſelves to partake of that *Holy Feaſt* on *Eaſter Day*, a Sermon upon that *Mystery* may be of ſome Uſe to us in that Reſpect, eſpecially, it being an Argument which is not often treated of in this Place.

Three Things I beg leave to lay before you relating to this *Sacrament*.

I. *First*, The *Obligation* that lies upon all *Chriſtians* to Communicate in it, and to Communicate frequently.

II. *Secondly*, The *Benefits* and *Advantages* we ſhall receive by ſo practiſing.

III. *Thirdly*, The little or no Weight that there is in the common *Pretences*, which uſually keep People from this frequent Communicating.

I. I begin with the *First Thing*, viz. the *Obligation that lies upon all Chriſtians to receive the Sacrament, and to receive it frequently*: And here I take my Riſe from our Saviour's Words that I have now read to you, *Do this*, ſaith he, *in Remembrance of me*. Theſe are the Words by which he did *inſtitute* or appoint for ever this Sacred *Mystery* of the *Communion*. Here he gives a Commandment to his Diſciples, that they ſhould *do this in Remembrance of him*. But what is it they muſt do? Why, the Words going before do inform us: They muſt do that which *Chriſt* now did; that is, they muſt *take Bread*,
and

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and *blefs it*, and *break it*, and *give it*: This they must do *in Remembrance of Christ*. Now, if it was the Duty of the *Apostles*, and those that succeeded them in the Ministry of the Church, thus to *take Bread*, and *blefs it*, and *break it*, and *give it*; then certainly it must be the Duty of all *Christians* committed to their Care, to *receive*, and *eat the Bread* so taken, and blessed, and broken, and given, *in Remembrance of Christ*: And the same likewise as to the *Cup*, which our Saviour appointed to go along with it.

You see then, in the *First Place*, That the receiving of the *Sacrament* is a necessary and a perpetual Duty, incumbent upon all *Christians*; for it is expressly commanded by our Saviour, and the Reason of the Command doth extend to all Persons, and to all Ages of the World: *Do this*, says he, *in Remembrance of me*: And to the same purpose St. Paul, 1 Cor. xi. 26. *As often as ye eat this Bread, and drink this Cup, ye do shew forth the Lord's Death till he come*. If now it be a perpetual Duty to *remember Christ*; if it be a perpetual Duty to *shew forth his Death till he comes*; then it must of necessity be a Duty to make use of those *Symbols and Ceremonies* that he hath appointed to *remember him*, and to *shew forth his Death by*; and it must be a Duty thus to do to the *World's End*, because *Christ*

Christ is not to come till then. And farther, if it be a Duty to remember *Christ*, and to shew forth his Death *frequently*; and the more *frequently* we do it, the better *Christians* we are, as is on all hands acknowledged; then, in the same Degree and Proportion, ought we to think ourselves obliged to a *frequent* Participation of this *Sacrament*.

But, *Secondly*, That we should thus join in giving and receiving the *Sacrament* of the Lord's Supper *in Remembrance of Christ*, is not only his exprefs Command, but such a Command, that, if we consider the Time, in which it was given, and the Circumstances likewise, with which he gave it, we cannot but be sensible, that we ought to have a most especial particular Regard to it. This was in a manner the last Command he gave to his Disciples: He was now a going to part from them, and to do the greatest Kindness for Mankind that ever was done: He was a going to lay down his Life, as an *Offering* for the Sins of Men, and by his Death to procure Everlasting Salvation for them; and now, at parting, he desires this particular Thing of them, which he would have observed by them, and all that came after them; namely, That in *Memory* of him they would *blefs Bread and Wine*, and eat and drink them for his sake. Ought not these Circum-

Circumstances to be a strange Endearment of this *Institution*, to all that profess themselves his Disciples? Will not every good-natured ingenuous Man, that considers these Things, be naturally apt to put a more than ordinary Value upon those dear *Pledges* that our *dying* Saviour hath thus bequeathed to us? Or is it possible that any one can so much as pretend to love our Lord *Jesus*, and yet be so insensible of his last Commands, and the Circumstances wherewith they were given, as to live in a constant and wilful Neglect of them?

But this is not all that doth recommend this Duty to us. There is this farther Thing, in the *Third* Place, to be considered: This is, in a manner, the *peculiar* Command of our Saviour, the only proper Act of *Christian Worship* that he hath appointed. To assemble together in publick for the Service of GOD: for the asking Pardon for our Sins; for the begging Mercies and Favours from him; for the returning our Thanks, and Praises, and Acknowledgments for Benefits received; and also for the receiving Instructions and Admonitions about our Moral Conversation, and the Truths and Duties of our Religion, is common to all the Religions in the World: Both *Jews* and *Turks* do this as well as *Christians*: But to join together

together in *Commemorating the Death of Christ*, is the peculiar Duty that is incumbent on us, as we profess to be the Followers of *Jesus*. It is the *distinguishing* Badge of our Profession: It is an Act of Worship that our Lord hath ordained, for our evidencing to all the World, that we are *his* Disciples, and that we own *him* to be our Lord and Master. And therefore, though in our other Offices of Devotion we may be truly said to worship God, and to give Honour to our Saviour; yet we cannot be said so properly to worship as *Christians*, except we join in those sacred *Mysteries* that *Christ* has made peculiar to his own Religion: And upon this Account it was, that the Primitive *Christians* looked upon this Service of the *Communion* as so necessary, so essential a Part of the *Christian Worship*, that they never held their publick Assemblies without it; and none of the Faithful, in those Days, that came to *Prayers*, went away till they had been Partakers of the *Sacrament*. This Consideration surely ought to lay a mighty Obligation upon all that call themselves by the Name of *Christ*, and would be thought his daily Worshipers, to omit no Opportunity that is offered them, of doing Homage to their Saviour in this way.

But *Fourthly* and *Lastly*, To give you a farther Argument of our Obligation to

the frequent Practice of this Duty, let me a little more particularly insist on the End, for which this *Sacrament* was instituted, as it is here assigned by our Saviour: *Do this*, says he, *in Remembrance of me*. The great Business of this sacred Mystery is to commemorate the Death of our Lord, and the Benefits we receive thereby; and to express our Thankfulness to God and him for them. Now can any Man profess himself a *Christian*, and yet not think himself obliged to take every Occasion of doing this; nay, and to be glad when such an Occasion is offer'd? Doth all the great Love of our Saviour, in laying down his Life, and thereby purchasing Eternal Happiness for us, not deserve so much as a *Remembrance*? Are there no *Thanks* due to him for the inexpressible Humiliation of himself, to take our Flesh upon him; and in that Flesh to undergo God knows how many Sorrows and Afflictions for our sakes; and, at last, for our sakes to expose himself to an ignominious tormenting Crucifixion, that *thro' his Stripes we might be healed*, thro' his *Death* we might obtain *Life*? What, I say, is not all this worthy of some *Remembrance*, some *Thanks*? Yes, certainly, every one among us, that believes *Christ* to have done and suffer'd all this for us, must needs think, we ought to remember this great Kindness as long as we live, and to give

give him continual Thanks for it. But yet let me tell you, the only *solemn* Way that he hath appointed for our Commemoration of these his Benefits, and expressing our Thankfulness for them, is this of receiving the Sacrament: *Do this in Remembrance of me*: This is the great Purpose and Intent of it: This is the Way, in which *Christ* will be *remembered* and *thanked* for his Favours: And sure it is very idle to think of any other Methods than what he himself hath appointed; and they must be intolerably ungrateful that will not do thus much for him. If our Saviour, for the Commemoration of his Benefits, and the shewing our Thankfulness for them, had commanded us some extremely severe Thing (as among several of the *Pagan* Nations their *Commemorative Mysteries*, in honour of their Deities, were cruel and severe enough) we might then, indeed, have had some colourable Excuse for our seldom or unfrequent Expressions of our Obedience to his Commands: But now, when he requires no more of us, than to come to his *Table*, and there to *eat* and *drink* in *Remembrance* of him, and in token of our *Thankfulness* to him; they must either be no Believers, or have very little Sense of his Kindness, that can easily absent themselves, and deny him such Expressions of their *Gratitude*.

The Sixth Sermon.

I must confess to you, these Things seem to me to carry so much Weight and Force in them, that I cannot but wonder how it comes to pass that our *Communion*s are generally so little frequented; nay, that they are not as full as our Assemblies for *Prayers* or *Sermons*; the Duty being so very necessary, and the Performance of it so little troublesome, and withal, the Benefits that accrue to us from the due Performance of it, being so many, and so great. Of which I now come to speak, that being the *second* Head I am to discourse of.

II. In the *second* Place, As for the *Benefits* and *Advantages* which we shall reap by a conscientious Discharge of our Duty in this Matter, they are truly *Great*, I may say *Invaluable*. Indeed, in all the Instances wherein God has laid his Commands upon us, we may, from the Obedience we yield to them, certainly promise to ourselves great Blessings and Rewards; for all God's Commandments are for our good, and not for his. But this holds in none more than in this particular Instance we are now speaking of. *Three* Things I shall briefly represent to you upon this Head; and they are of so great Moment, that whoever considers them, cannot but be convinced, that it is extremely to his own Loss and Prejudice, that he doth at any time neglect the Opportunities that are
afforded

afforded him of approaching to the Lord's Table.

First of all, The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper is the great and solemn Means that Christ has appointed in his Church to all Christians, for the obtaining the Pardon and Forgiveness of their Sins committed since their Baptism. As the Sacrament of Baptism was instituted by Christ, for the entering Men into Covenant with God, by the Means whereof all the Sins they were guilty of before they became Christians, were forgiven; so this other Sacrament of his Supper was instituted for the renewing that Covenant with God, by the Means whereof all their Sins since their Baptism are remitted to them, and a Conveyance likewise made of all the other Benefits of Christ's Sacrifice on the Cross.

This is the Doctrine of the Catholick Church in this Matter of the Two Sacraments: And it will receive some Light from the Two great Sacraments among the Jews, Circumcision and Sacrifices, which were eminent Types and Figures of our Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Among the Jews, the Way that God appointed for the entering Persons into Covenant with him, was Circumcision: And whoever was Circumcised, was entitled thereby to all the Benefits and Advantages that were promised and made over by that Covenant. And the same Thing we say,

as to all those that are entered into the New Covenant of *Jesus Christ by Baptism*. Well now, but if an *Israelite* thus entered into Covenant with God, happened afterwards to transgress any Law of God; before he could obtain Forgiveness, and be restored to God's Favour, he must offer such Sacrifices as the Law had appointed in that Case: And by offering these Sacrifices he renewed his Covenant with God, and was admitted to that State, which by his Sin he had forfeited. And the very way of offering up these Sacrifices did very lively represent this: For when a Man brought any of this kind of Sacrifices, after that Sacrifice had been offered to God, part of it was burnt upon the Altar, which was God's Portion; and another part of it was given back to the Man that brought it, for him to feast upon with his Family: By which was signified, That the Man thus *eating* of God's *Meat*, and *feeding*, as it were, at God's *Table*, was restored to his Grace and Favour, and in Covenant with him: *Eating and drinking together*, being the Ceremony used among all Nations, for the expressing Friendship and Reconciliation, and for the ratifying Leagues and Covenants.

Now to the same Use and Purpose, say we, serves our *Sacrament of the Lord's Supper*; or, as it was called by the Ancients, the

the *Christian Sacrifice*: Not that we pretend, in our Communions, to offer up the real *Body* and *Blood* of *Christ* in *Sacrifice* to God, as the Papists do; for that, as the Apostle tells us, was once done by himself upon the Cross, and *by that one Offering he hath for ever perfected all them that are sanctified*; so that there is no need of any such Offering any more: But we *Commemorate* that *Sacrifice* which *Christ* has on this Day made for us; and we thank God for it; and we heartily beseech him, that he would accept of it on our behalf; and that it may make *Atonement* for all our Sins: And we likewise *feed* upon it, as the *Jews* did upon their *Sacrifices*; that is to say; by *eating* of that *Bread* which he made to be his *Body*, and drinking of that *Cup* which he made to be his *Blood*. Now, in doing of this, we may be truly said both to offer up a *Sacrifice* to God, and likewise to keep a *Feast* upon this *Sacrifice*. We offer up, by *Commemoration*, and *Thanksgiving*, and hearty *Prayer*, that *Sacrifice* that was once offered by *Jesus Christ* at *Jerusalem*, near Seventeen hundred Years ago, for the Salvation of all Mankind: And we partake both of the *Body* and *Blood* of that his *Sacrifice*, by partaking of the *Bread* and *Wine* that he has consecrated not only to be the *Symbols* and *Signs* of them, but to convey the real

Benefits of his *Passion* and *Sacrifice* to all Believers: So that we may be truly said to feed at God's *Table*, whenever we receive the *Sacrament*: And if we come worthily disposed, to have all our past Sins blotted out, and to be received into his *Grace*, and *Favour*, and *Friendship*; which is all that I mean by renewing our Covenant with him,

But, that I may not seem to ground so important a Doctrine as this is, merely upon the *Types* and *Figures* of the *Old Testament*, I ought to tell you, That all I have said is sufficiently clear, both from our Saviour's own Words in the Institution of this Sacrament, and likewise from St. Paul, Our Saviour calls the Cup of the Sacrament, Luke xxii. 20. *The New Covenant in his Blood*: Or, as it is in another Evangelist, *The Blood of the* Mat. xxvi. 28. *New Covenant, which was shed for many for the Remission of Sins*. St. Paul likewise tells us, That *the Cup of Blessing which we bless, and the Bread which we break, is the Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ*: The Sense of which is plainly this, That these sacred Signs make them that use them, to have *Communion with Christ crucified*. The Partaking of the *Bread*, and of the *Cup*, is the Means that God hath appointed for our partaking of the Benefits of *Christ's Body* that was broken, and of his *Blood* that was shed for us; that is to say, the Forgiveness

ness of our Sins, and all the other Fruits and Advantages of his Passion.

Is not this now a Consideration that should strongly oblige all *Christians* to a frequent Participation of this *Sacrament*? Can any thing more recommend this Ordinance to us, than the Thoughts that it cancels all the Scores between God and us, provided we come prepared as we ought to be? That it puts us into a State of his Favour, and enters us into so strict a League of Friendship with him, as not all the Powers of Earth and Hell can dissolve, unless we ourselves be Traitors to ourselves.

These are great Things; but these are not all: For, in the *Second* Place, another Advantage we have by the Sacrament is, That *it is in itself an excellent Instrument for the making Men grow in Virtue and Goodness.*

That serious Reflection upon a Man's own Ways; that careful Examination and Enquiry into the State of his own Soul; those Expressions of Sorrow and Repentance for what he finds amiss in himself; and the earnest Prayers he makes to God for his Grace, together with the hearty Resolutions he enters into, of a better Obedience for the future: All which Things are necessary Preparations for the worthy Partaking of this solemn Mystery, especially in one that comes but seldom to it
(for

(for indeed the Case is otherwise as to those that so live, as to be always prepared for it, and accordingly do take all Occasions of receiving it) I say, these Things are the likeliest Means in the World, not only to keep up in a Man the Sense of Virtue and Piety towards God, but also to restore it, when through Carelessness it is in a manner quite lost; or, if it be not lost or decayed, to increase and advance it, and to make it much clearer and brighter than ever it was.

O! how ought this Consideration to prevail with all Persons that make a Conscience of Religion, and endeavour to serve God as well as they can, and mean to persevere in that Course of Life; to take every Occasion that is offered to partake of this Divine Ordinance! Such is the Nature of our Souls, while they are pent up in these Earthly Tabernacles, and surrounded with sensible Objects, that the Spiritual Impressions that are stamp'd upon them must be continually renewed, or else, in a little time, they will be quite defaced and lost: The most ardent Love to God and Virtue will by Degrees flag and grow cold, unless it be by some Means or other frequently excited. *Wisely* therefore, and *admirably* for our Advantage, hath our Lord *Jesus* contrived this Means of the *Holy Sacrament*, for the preventing

venting or remedying these Inconveniencies. By obliging us to a frequent Communication in this divine Office, he hath put us upon the Necessity of so often thinking and meditating on spiritual Matters, of impressing upon our Souls all those Arguments that at first prevail'd with us to enter upon a Course of Virtue, and of reinforcing all our Vows and Resolutions to give up ourselves to the Service of GOD; that it will not be an easy Matter to forget our Duty, or to relapse from our good Purposes.

And the Nature of the Mystery itself is such, that nothing in the World can be better contrived for the attaining these Ends; that is to say, for the working in us a perfect Hatred of all Sin and Wickedness, and raising up our Affections to the most passionate Love of our Saviour. Since there we have, in the most sensible Manner, represented to us the infinite unspeakable Kindness that the Son of GOD expressed to the Sons of Men, in laying down his Life for them; and the infinite Malignity that is in Sin, which was so odious to the pure Eyes of GOD, that nothing less than the Blood of his own Son could make Expiation for it.

Whoever therefore is now piously disposed, and intends to go on in that good Way, and to grow better and better, let him, as frequently as he can, make Use of this Means which GOD hath appointed for these

these very Ends. This is the best Way to make the *Grain of Mustard-seed*, sown in our Hearts, to become a great *Tree*. This is the surest Method, not only to keep the *smoking Flax* from being quenched, but to make it *blaze out in Flames*.

Which we shall be farther convinced of, if we consider, in the *Third Place*, another Advantage which we reap by this *Sacrament*; and that is this, That it doth not only minister to the promoting Piety and Holiness, by making us more serious, and putting us more upon the Exercise of Devotion; but also, in this respect, that it is a Means whereby *more Grace and Strength is derived to us from the Holy Spirit of Christ*.

We have already said, That our Lord ordained this *Sacrament* as the general Instrument whereby he would actually apply to Believers all the Benefits of his Passion. Now the Benefits that *Christ* purchased for us by his Death, were not only the *Pardon* of our Sins, of which we have spoken before, but also the *Grace and Assistance* of his *Holy Spirit*, in order to our performing those Conditions which he hath required of us. Now, as the partaking of this *Sacrament* is the standing ordinary Means of receiving the former Benefit, namely, the *Pardon* of our Sins; so is it also of receiving the latter; that
is,

is, the *Strength*, and *Support*, and *Influences* of the *Holy Spirit*. By partaking of these Holy Mysteries as we should do, we are made *one with Christ*, and *Christ with us*, as our Church expresses it; we become *living Branches* of the *true Vine*, and, consequently derive all that vital Juice and Sap from *Christ our Root*, that is needful for our bringing forth *good Fruit*. This is the proper Method to allure down the *Divine Spirit* of *Jesus* to come and dwell with us; to oblige him to take up his Habitation in our Hearts, so that we shall be truly the *Temples* of the *Living God*.

O! what an Inducement ought this to be to us to make ourselves constant Guests at this *Holy Feast*, since we may there get Strength against all our Infirmities, Physick for all our Diseases, Support against all the Evils that oppress us! Are there any of us that are hard put to it, either through the prevailing Infirmities of our Natures, or those that our evil Customs have brought upon us? Are there any of us that want Strength or Courage to grapple with our Spiritual Enemies, or to resist those Temptations that daily make Assaults upon us in our Way of Living? Why here we may have Remedy. By coming frequently, and conscientiously, and devoutly to this Feast of *God*, we may gain such *Refreshment*, such *Support*, such *Strength* and *Power*, as
will

will enable us to go thro' our Work cheerfully and successfully; such *Succours* as will not fail, if we faithfully make use of them, to vanquish all our Spiritual Adversaries; and lastly, such *Comfort* and *Peace* of Mind, as will make our Lives tolerably easy under all the Difficulties, and Troubles, and Calamities of this miserable World.

And now these Considerations, one would think, should sufficiently recommend the frequent Practice of this Piece of Religion to all of us, that have either any Love to God, or Regard to their own Happiness: But notwithstanding all this, there are some such fatal *Prejudices* that Men have too often taken up concerning this *Sacrament*, that all Discourses of this nature are generally ineffectual. Some of these therefore I shall endeavour, in the *Third* and *Last* Place, to remove out of the Way, and so conclude.

III. The *Prejudices* and *Misapprehensions* that Men lie under as to this Business, and which usually fright them from coming to the *Sacrament*, are very many; but the greatest and most common of them are these *two* following: The general Sense that Men have of their own *Unfitness* to receive it; and the infinite *Danger* they run, if they should happen to *Receive Unworthily*. Upon these *two* Accounts it is that many, that are otherwise well disposed Persons, dare
not

not come to the Lord's Table: They are so affrighted with the Apprehension of their own Guilt, and their Unworthiness to partake of so solemn a Mystery; and likewise with the terrible Punishment that is threatened to all those that receive Unworthily, that they think it much better wholly to absent themselves from the *Sacrament*, than run the Hazard they must do, by taking it in the Circumstances they are. These *two* Things I shall, at this time, briefly speak to.

And *First*, It is commonly urged by the generality of Men, as an Excuse for absenting themselves from the Sacrament, That they are no way qualified for it: They are not in a Condition of coming to the Lord's Table, by reason of the Remissness and Carelessness of their Lives, and their falling so many Degrees short of that Holiness the Gospel of *Christ* requires of them.

But to this let me say, in the *First* Place, Whose Fault is this? Why do we not all live better? Who hinders us from being so good as we ought to be? Either it is in our Power to live so, as may put us into a Condition of worthily performing this Instance of our Duty to our Lord, or it is not in our Power: If it be in our Power, then we cannot in the least plead this for an Excuse of our not doing it: If it be not in our Power, then we can
contract

contract no new Guilt by coming to Receive, though we should prove to Receive Unworthily, provided we have done the best we can. But, in God's Name, how dare we live at such a rate, that we are incapable of joining in the principal Part of the *Christian* Worship? Nothing in the World can *unqualify* us for that, but what, at the same time, doth render us *unqualified* for the Kingdom of Heaven: And dare we live so, that, if God should this Day call us out of the World, we should think ourselves in a State of Damnation?

But, *Secondly*, Though we do not live so well as we desire; though our Lives be not so holy, and so pure, and so heavenly, as may become the Partakers of so divine a Mystery as that of the Sacrament is; yet let us not for this wholly absent ourselves from it: Nay, rather let us come the oftener to it, for that is the Means to make us better. It is the most effectual Course we can take to promote Virtue and Piety in ourselves: Whereas, if we never come at all, we take the direct Way to be always as bad as we are, or rather to grow worse and worse.

Would any one advise a sensual careless Man, by no means to take a *Bible* into his Hands, or to come to *Prayers*, or to hear *Sermons*, because he is very unfit for, and unworthy of such Exercises? No surely,
he

he will rather propose the Use of these Things to such a Person, as a singular Means to gain him to Virtue and Sobriety. The very same Thing we may say of the Use of the *Sacrament of the Lord's Supper*. It may, and often doth prove a happy Expedient, thro' the Mercy of God, to make those *good* that were not so before.

I speak not this to encourage any vicious, evil Liver, to approach to this Ordinance, if he thinks of continuing in his Sins. No, very unfit it is, that that holy *Bread* should be given to such *unclean Creatures*. But this is what I would say, Let none upon account of their forepast Lives be discouraged from doing their Duty to God in this Ordinance: On the contrary, if they can be truly sorry for their Sins, and heartily resolve, with the Grace of God, to forsake them; Let them come with Cheerfulness to the *Lord's Table*, not doubting but God will kindly receive them, and will give them such *Grace* and *Strength*; and if they will make use of it, they shall not fail of being true Converts to Holiness and Piety.

2. It is said, in the *Second Place*, That the Sin of *unworthy Receiving* is so great, and the *Punishment* threatened to it so grievous, that it seems safer not to Receive at all, than to run such a desperate Hazard. This is another Consideration that frights many from the Sacrament, though

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otherwise well disposed Persons. That Passage of St. Paul is always running in their Minds, 1 Cor. xi. 29. *He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh Damnation to himself.* This is the Text that frights them. But now as to this, I pray let it be considered:

In the *First* Place, Those among us that are so fearful of coming to the *Sacrament*, are in no Danger at all of *Receiving Unworthily*, in the Sense that St. Paul useth this Term: For the Unworthy Receiving that he so severely censures in the *Corinthians*, was their approaching to the *Lord's Table* with so little a Sense of what they were about, that, as he here expresseth it, *they did not discern the Lord's Body*: That is to say, they made no Distinction between the *Bread of the Sacrament*, and *common Food*. Things were then at that Pass among the *Corinthians*, that when they met together to receive the *Sacrament* (which, in those Days, was usually ushered in by a common Feast of Rich and Poor together) they used the Church more like an *Eating or Tipling House*, than the *House of God*. This you may see in the 20th Verse of that Chapter: *When, saith he, ye come together into one Place, this is not to eat the Lord's Supper: For in eating, every one takes before other his own Supper, and one is hungry, and another is drunken. What, have*

ye

ye not Houses to eat and drink in, or despise ye the Church of God? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I praise you not. Thus far St. Paul, in that Place. Now sure, such an unworthy, irreverent, profane Carriage as this, at the Receiving the Holy Sacrament, might justly deserve that severe Censure that he there passeth upon it: *He that eateth and drinketh thus unworthily, eateth and drinketh Damnation to himself, because he discerneth not the Lord's Body.* But, I hope, there is none of those among us that are so very scrupulous about coming to the Sacrament, can be in any Danger of profaning it after this manner.

But, Secondly, The Damnation which St. Paul here denounceth, is not, perhaps, so frightful as is commonly apprehended: For all that he saith, if the Original be consulted, will appear to be no more than this, He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh Judgment to himself; meaning hereby, that he who doth thus affront our Lord's Institution, by making no Distinction between the Bread of the Sacrament and common Food, doth by this his Profaneness, draw down severe Judgments from God upon his own Head: For, for this Cause (saith he in the next Words) many are weak and sickly among you, and many are fallen asleep. But here is not a Word of Everlasting Damnation, much less of any

Man's being concluded in that State, by *Receiving Unworthily*; unless one will say, That all those who are visited by God's *Judgments* in this World, shall be *damned* in the next; which is so far from being true, that *St. Paul*, in this very Place, affirms the contrary, namely, in *ver. 32.* where he tells us, That *when we are thus judged* (in this World) *we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the World.*

But *Thirdly*, Admitting *St. Paul* in these Words to mean *Damnation* in our usual Sense, yet still the utmost they can come to, will be no more than this, That whosoever *eateth* and *drinketh* thus *unworthily*, as the *Corinthians* did, is guilty of a *damnable Sin*. But now there are a great many other Cases, besides this of the *Sacrament*, in which a Man is guilty of a damnable Sin, if he do not perform his Duty as he ought to do. He that *prays* or *bears unworthily*, or in any Instance performs the Worship of God, or professeth the Christian Religion *unworthily*: I say, such a Man, according to the *Protestant Doctrine*, may be said to do these Things to his own *Damnation*, upon the same Account that he is said to *eat* and *drink* his own *Damnation* that communicates *unworthily* in the *Sacrament*, tho' perhaps not in so high a Degree: That is to say, such a Man is guilty of a Sin that is in its own Nature damnable, and may prove
so

so to him, unless either by a *particular* or *general* Repentance, he obtains God's Pardon for it: But yet for all this, there is no Man will, for these Reasons, think it advisable to leave off the Practice of these Duties: But the only Consequence he will draw from hence is, that he is so much the more concerned to take Care that he perform them as he ought to do.

But *Fourthly* and *Lastly*, to conclude, Let the Sin of *coming* to the *Sacrament unworthily*, be as *great* and as *damnable* as we can reasonably suppose it, yet this is that we contend for, the Sin of totally withdrawing from it, is *greater* and more *damnable*: So that if he who partakes of it *unworthily*, doth *eat* and *drink Damnation* to himself; he that partakes not at all, is so far from mending the Matter, that he doth increase that *Damnation*. The Truth of this Assertion depends upon that known Rule of *casuistical* Divinity, That it is a greater Sin to omit a known Duty altogether, than to perform that Duty as well as we can, though with much Unworthiness.

But I dare hold you no longer upon this Argument; I would only say this, and I have done. Though I am far from encouraging any to approach the Lord's Table without due Qualifications; or from extenuating any Man's Sin that comes *unworthily* (*unworthily*, I mean in the Scripture

pture Sense of the Word, and not as it is understood by some People among us) yet this I say, That if Men did seriously consider what a *Sin* it is to live without the *Sacrament*, it being an apparent Neglect, and looking like a Contempt of our Saviour's *Institution*, and a renouncing the *Worship* of God, and the *Communion* of the Church, in the great Instance of Christian Worship and Christian Communion: And withal, what terrible Consequences they bring upon themselves thereby, even the depriving themselves of the chief of those ordinary Means which our Lord hath appointed for the obtaining *Remission* of Sins, and the *Grace* and Influences of the *Holy Spirit*: I say, if Men did seriously consider these Things, they would not look upon it as so slight a Matter, voluntarily to *excommunicate* themselves from the Society of the Faithful, as to the partaking in this great *Duty* and *Privilege* of *Christians*; but what Apprehensions soever they had of the *Sin* and *Danger* of *Receiving Unworthily*, they would, for all that, think it more *sinful* and more *dangerous* not to receive at all.

I pray God give us all Grace, seriously to consider these Things, and so enlighten our Minds, and dispose our Wills by his Holy Spirit, that laying aside all Prejudices and Sloth, and carnal Affections, we may sincerely apply ourselves to serve God constantly

stantly and diligently in this, and all the other Instances that he hath commanded us, to the Glory of his blessed Name, and to our own great Comfort, and Increase in Piety and Virtue. *This God of his infinite Mercy grant, &c.*



SERMON VII.

Preached before the

QUEEN

A T

St. JAMES's Chapel,

On CHRISTMAS DAY, 1704.

I JOHN iii. 8.

— *For this Purpose was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the Works of the Devil.*

WHAT is here meant by the *Works of the Devil*, is plain from the former Part of the Verse, *He that committeth Sin, saith the Apostle, is of the Devil; for the Devil sinned from the Beginning: And then it follows, For this Purpose was the Son of God manifested,*
that

that he might destroy the Works of the Devil. So that *the Works of the Devil* are all manner of Sin and Wickedness; and consequently the *destroying of the Works of the Devil* must mean the destroying out of Mankind all Sin and Wickedness, and in the Place thereof, planting in them all manner of Virtue and Holiness. And this the Apostle here affirms to be the great End of *Christ's* coming into the World.

It is the same Account of *Christ's* Undertaking, in other Words, that St. Paul gives us in the *Second to Titus*, *Christ* therefore gave himself for us, *that he might redeem us from all Iniquity, and purify to himself a peculiar People zealous of good Works.* And the same Account likewise that St. Peter gives of it in the *Third of the Acts*, *Unto you first*, saith he, *God having raised up his Son Jesus* (that great Prophet whom God, by *Moses*, promised to raise up to his People) *hath sent him to bless you in turning away every one of you from his Iniquities.* Lastly, It is the same Account that *Zacharias* gives us of the Design of our Lord's Coming into the World, in the first of St. Luke, namely, *That we being delivered from the Hands of our [Spiritual] Enemies, might serve God without Fear, in Holiness and Righteousness before him all the Days of our Life.*

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It were to be wished, that this was more considered and laid to Heart by all of us that profess to be *Christ's* Disciples. If it was, it would be impossible for many of us to lead such Lives as we do, without the utmost Confusion, and the continual Reproaches of our own Consciences. But whilst other Sorts of Accounts have been taken up concerning *Christ's* Undertaking, and the Design of his Religion, so different from that which my Text, and the other Passages I have quoted, do give of it; whilst Men have represented our Saviour to themselves, as one that was sent rather to free them from the Punishment of their Sins, than from the Power and Dominion of them; as one that came not so much to make them really righteous in their own Persons, as to impute his own Righteousness to them; and to fulfil the Law of God for them, rather than to oblige them to a more strict Obedience to it: Whilst they have been willing to look upon his Gospel, not as a practical Institution to teach us, and oblige us to live well, or as the Means appointed by God for the reforming the Manners of Mankind, but only as a System of Propositions to be believed and professed, together with some few outward Precepts to be practised by us, in order to the distinguishing us from the rest of the World: Whilst, I say, we have entertained such Notions as
these

these concerning the Religion of our Lord *Jesus Christ*; it is no Wonder that it hath no greater Effect upon Mens Lives, than we see it has at this Day; but is become a barren, evanid, ineffectual Thing, a Matter of Words and Dispute, a mere piece of Book-learning, a Name to distinguish Parties by, and little more.

Give me Leave therefore, at this Time, and on this Day, on which we are met to commemorate the Son of God's being manifested in the Flesh, to discourse to you of the great End and Design of this his Manifestation, as it is here declared to us by his Apostle. This I am sure, as it is a proper Argument for the Season; so, if it be well considered, it will effectually keep us from placing our Christianity in such Things as we see Men commonly do; and will oblige us, above all Things, to a serious and hearty Endeavour after universal Virtue and Sanctity; it being certain that the planting of this in us, and the *destroying* out of us all Sin and Wickedness, which are the proper *Works of the Devil*, was the great End of *Christ's* coming into the World, and of the Religion which he set on Foot among Men.

This is the Point therefore, that I shall endeavour to make out at this Time. And in order to the so doing, it will be sufficient to shew these Two Things,

First,

The Seventh Sermon.

First, *That this was an End and Design most worthy of the Son of God, to propose to himself in his Undertakings for Mankind.* And Secondly, *That the History of our Lord, and the Religion he instituted, do all along, throughout the whole Structure and Contrivance of them, visibly express such a Design.*

I. I begin with the *First*, That to deliver Men from the Bondage of their Sins, and to restore their Natures to a State of Virtue and Holiness, was a Design most worthy of the Son of God to propose to himself in his Undertakings for Mankind. Now the Truth of this will appear, if we either consider how necessary, how essential an ingredient Holiness is to the Happiness of Mankind; or, on the other Side, how impossible it is in the Nature of the Thing, for any Man to be happy that is under the Power and Dominion of Sin: For from hence it will be evident, that if our Saviour's Errand into the World was to serve the Interests of Mankind, he could propose no Design to himself more glorious, more worthy of the Son of God, than this that we are speaking of.

And *First*, Let us see how much a holy divine Frame of Soul contributes to our Happiness. I pray what doth the chief Happiness of any Being consist in; but in these two Things? In having its Nature advanced to the greatest Perfection it is capable

pable of; and *Secondly*, In being put into the Possession of the greatest Good it can enjoy. Let us now apply this to Mankind. And *First*, I ask what is the highest Excellence and Perfection that human Nature is capable of? Is it not to be made as like unto God as is possible? There is no doubt of it. The Measure of all created Excellency and Perfection, can be nothing else but the Divine Nature, which is Perfection itself; and therefore the nearest Approach that any Nature can make to that, is a State of the utmost Perfection that that Nature can arrive to: But now there is nothing in the World, by which we can approach nearer unto God, nothing that can give us a greater Resemblance of his Nature, than those Moral Accomplishments of the Mind we are speaking of; that is to say, universal Purity, and Righteousness, and Goodness. For, as on the one Hand, these are the Things that constitute the very Being of the Divine Life, and are (if one may so speak) the Top, the Flower of all the Perfections that are in God's Nature; so on the other Hand, these are the only Qualities, in which it is possible for Mankind to imitate him. Our Natures will not admit that we should be Infinite, Independent, Omnipotent and Omniscient, as God is; but we may be, nay, we are commanded to be Holy, as God is Holy, Merciful, as God is Merciful,

ciful, and perfect in the inward Goodness and Rectitude of our Mind, as our Heavenly Father is perfect. That is the First Thing.

And then, *Secondly*, As for the being put into the Possession of the greatest Good we are capable of, which is the other Part of the chief Happiness, and without which, indeed, all Excellency of Nature would not signify very much; forasmuch as no Creature, how excellent soever, is Self-sufficient: As for this I say, I ask again, whether there can be a greater Good than God? If not, then, whether he that is put in a Condition of enjoying God, be not put into the Possession of the greatest Good he is capable of? It certainly must be granted. But now I say, it is true Holiness and Goodness only, that can put Mankind into a Capacity of enjoying God; nay, not only so, but doth put those that are endowed with it, into an actual Enjoyment of him. [In some Degree of this Life, but in Fullness and Perfection hereafter.] For pray, wherein consists the Enjoyment of God? Doth it not consist in loving him with all our Heart, and Soul, and Strength, and rejoicing in the Sense of his Love to us; in being inwardly and powerfully affected with his Presence, with his Goodness, with all his Excellencies; and in a Word, in having one Mind and one Will with him?

But

But what is all this, but either the very Essence, or the proper and natural Exercise of that Holiness and Goodness we are now discoursing of? As therefore before we saw that true Holiness makes us like unto God; so by what has been now said, we see that it inseparably unites us to him; and thereby makes that inexhausted Fountain of all Good to be as much ours, as our Capacities will admit of. And still the more holy, the more pure, the more devout we grow, still we shall more and more enjoy God, and so for ever and ever.

There needs no more to be said for the shewing how necessary, how essential true Goodness is to the Happiness of Mankind. I do not here say that this alone will make a Man compleatly happy: For Human Nature being made up of Soul and Body, there must be a great many other Things taken Care of, besides the Holiness and Purity of the Mind, in order to the rendering that Compound which we call *Man*, entirely happy. And the providing for these likewise, was one Part of our Saviour's Business in the World. But seeing the main Things required to our Happiness, are those we have been speaking of, it was necessary that he should, in the First Place, provide for them. And therefore with good Reason do we say, that there was the First and
great

great Design of his Coming, namely, to restore the Image of God in fallen Mankind.

But for the farther clearing of this Truth, let us, in the *Second Place*, turn our Thoughts to the State of Mankind, as they are under the Power and Dominion of Sin; and see whether so long as they continue in that State, it be not impossible for them to be happy, though there was no other Punishment to be dreaded from their Sins, but only such as ariseth from the Sins themselves.

Sin is an infinite Imperfection, and therefore an infinite Evil. It is the worst Corruption, and the greatest Debasement of Human Nature that is possible, and the farthest Recession in the World from the Divine Perfections, from their Approach to which all other Perfections have their Name and Estimate.

It is truly *ἡμεῶν δὲ τίμαι Ἄθεον*, as one of the Philosophers calls it, a perfect Lapse into Brutality, a State of flat Contradiction to God.

It is Evil pure and unmixt: No Circumstance in the World can make it in any Sense Good, whereas all other Evils so reputed, may be so circumstantiated, as to have some Mixture of Goodness or Commendableness in them.

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It is that which puts Mankind into an utter Incapacity of ever enjoying the Supreme Good, which no other Evil can do. For it is not more impossible (as the Apostle expresses it) for *Light to have Communion with Darkneſs*, than for *God to have Fellowship with Belial*. For though we should suppose a wicked Person, a Whoremonger for Instance, a Worldling, a Malicious, Prophane, or irreligious Person, to have all his Sins forgiven him; and not only so, but to be compassed about, and (as I may say) gilded over with all those external Glories, in which we do believe good Men shall shine in the Life to come; nay, and farther, to have an excellent Understanding given to him, so as that he was able to reach the Height of Seraphims in his sublime Contemplations: Yet so long as that wicked Nature remains in him, he would not, for all this, be a whit nearer to the enjoying of GOD; forasmuch as there can be no Enjoyment, where there is no Love, no Likeness of Nature, no Union of Mind. Nay, I know not whether these Circumstances we have placed him in (supposing such Circumstances compatible to such a Man) would not make him more miserable than otherwise he would be. For the Excellency of his Understanding, and those external Glories, would not suffer him to doubt, but that the greatest Good was

to be had in G O D : Yet through the Perverseness of his Nature he would find, that this Good would be so far from being a Good to him, that it would be the greatest of Evils : Forasmuch as there was the most infinite Unsuitableness and Disagreement between the Object presented to him, and his Faculties, that were to be exercised about it.

What shall I say more ? As Goodness is Health, so Sin is Sickness and Death : The worst Abuse of our highest Faculties, a State of Violence to Nature. 'Tis all that we call Unreasonableness, Confusion, Deformity, Monstrosity. In a Word, it is the greatest of all Evils, as being at the greatest Distance from the greatest Good.

So that these Things considered, we may reasonably conclude, that if *Christ* had any Design to make us happy ; nay, if he had any Design to make us not miserable ; it was necessary for him to redeem us from the Slavery of Sin, and to restore our Natures to their primitive Rectitude, by making us Virtuous and Good.

How inconsiderate then, how unreasonable are those Men, that would make the ultimate End of our Saviour's Undertaking, to be the freeing Men from the Punishment of their Sin, and the entitling them to eternal Happiness, without any respect
had

had to the Change and renewing of their Natures. For in the *First* Place, from what has been said, it is easy to see, how very much they do hereby disparage the Love and Kindness of our Saviour, and lessen his Undertaking. For whilst they make him only to have redeemed us from his Father's Wrath, and the Punishments consequent thereupon, leaving us, in the mean Time, to the Impurity and Corruption of our Natures, which of itself, without the Accession of any external Evil, is a Misery great enough; they do but make him half a Saviour: One that freed us indeed from some outward Evils, but left us irremediably exposed to many inward ones as great, or greater, than the other. One that delivered us from the Apprehensions of a Gibbet or an Executioner, but could not, or would not cure us of the intolerable Fevers and other Distempers, under which we fatally languished.

Secondly, It is easy to see likewise, how absurd a Notion these Men have of Happiness. For whilst they make a Man under the Power and Dominion of Sin, capable of the Happiness of the other World, which chiefly consists in the Fruition of God's Excellencies and Perfections, they do in Effect affirm, that a Man may be made happy by that, of which he hath no Sense, no Perception at all; or rather, to speak properly,

properly, by that, to which he hath the greatest Aversion and Antipathy. But in true speaking, Heaven to such a Man (I am sure that Heaven that is promised in the Scripture) would be so far from being a Place of Happiness, that bating the corporeal Pains, it would, in all Respects, be Hell itself.

Nor will it here help the Matter, to say, that the Righteousness of *Christ* is imputed to all Believers; and that by Virtue thereof, they are to all Intents and Purposes made Righteous, even as much as if they were Righteous in their own Persons: I say, this will not help the Matter. For so long as Sin and Wickedness are not mere Names, but real Things, and have their immutable Properties; let *Christ's* Righteousness be never so much imputed to us, yet so long as they remain in us, they will be Evils, they will make us miserable, they will put an eternal Bar to our Enjoyment of God. And we can no more hope to remedy this, by the Imputation of another's Righteousness, than a blind Man can hope to see by the Eyes of another; than a Man in the Fit of the Stone or Gout, can hope to find Ease by the Help of his Physician; than a crooked deformed Person can hope to be made straight and beautiful by the Comeliness of his Friend,

II. But

II. But to come to our second Head of Discourse. *As the destroying the Works of the Devil from among Men, and the making them sincerely Righteous, and Holy, and Good, was a Design most worthy of the Son of God to undertake:* So, in the Second Place, *his whole Transactions upon Earth, and the Religion he set on Foot in the World, were so contrived in every Part of them, as to be a manifest Pursuance of this Design.*

This is the second Thing I am to speak to; and for the making it good, there needs no more to be done, than only to desire any Man to cast his Eyes, either on the *Precepts* which our Lord delivered; or on the *Doctrines* he taught; or on the *Life* he led; or on the *Death* he suffered; or lastly, on what he hath been doing for Men at the right Hand of God ever since: All which taken together, do make up the entire History of our Saviour, and the whole Scheme of his Institution. If now it do appear, that the natural Tendency of every one of these was to make Men good; and that that was the End they all aimed at, then I hope our Proposition is sufficiently proved.

To go over all these Particulars at this Time, would prove too great an Exercise of your Patience, which I would not willingly injure; and therefore I shall confine myself to the *three* First of them, and those too I shall treat of very briefly and generally.

And *First* of all, that this was the Design of all our Saviour's Precepts, and the Law that he gave us, is evident beyond Contradiction. There is not one of them, which is not either an Injunction of some moral Virtue, or a Prohibition of some Vice, or a Recommendation of the Means, by which some Virtue is to be acquired, or some Sin to be mortified.

Whatever other Liberties the Gospel may have indulged unto Men, it is certain it grants none to their Vices. Never was Virtue taught in such Perfection, or exacted with such Severity, as we there find it. Never did any Man set the Duties of Human Life, in all its Relations, towards God, towards our Neighbours, and towards our selves, at so high a Pitch, as our Saviour hath there set them. All the Gentile World cannot shew us, out of all their great Masters of Morality, their most refined Philosophers, such a Collection of sublime and accurate Precepts of Living, as are delivered in one single Sermon of our Saviour's: That, I mean, upon the Mount.

So far is he from giving Countenance to any Sort of Wickedness or Impurity in the Practices of Mankind, that he hath forbid all the Tendencies and Approaches to it in the very Thoughts; having put Restraints upon the most secret and undiscernible Workings of our Minds towards every Thing that

that is Evil. *To look upon a Woman to lust after her*, is in his Account to commit *Adultery*. To be rashly and uncharitably *angry*, is forbid by him as a Degree of *Murder*. Not to forgive an Injury, is by his Law a Sin, as well as to do one.

I own that there is the greatest Encouragement given by our Saviour to all repenting Sinners that is possible; nay, though they have been the greatest of Sinners. But then he requires both a thorough Change of their Minds, and a thorough Reformation of their Manners too, before they must hope for any Benefit from him.

I own likewise, that there is in the Gospel all the Allowance made for the natural unavoidable Frailties and Weaknesses of Mankind, that can be desired. But then it supposes the Persons, to whom the Allowance is made, to be sincerely (though not perfectly) pure and upright, both in their Minds and Lives; that they harbour no Iniquity in their Hearts, nor practise any known Sin in their Conversation; nay, and that they do their best Endeavours likewise to overcome their very Infirmities.

In a Word, it is the fundamental Law of the Gospel, that *without Holiness no Man shall see God*; and all the particular Precepts we there meet with, do exactly

answer this general one, and are a purfuanee of it.

Nor, in the *Second* Place, is this Design of making Men Virtuous more conspicuous in our Saviour's Precepts, than in the Doctrines he delivered to Mankind. Those Truths (I mean) which he revealed from God to be believed by all those that should embrace his Religion. There was none of them calculated for the Gratification of Men's idle Curiosities, the busying and amusing them with airy and useles Speculations. Much less were they intended for an Excuse of our Credulity, or a Trial how far we could bring our Reasons to submit to our Faith. But as on one Hand, they were plain and simple, and such as by their Agreeableness to the rational Faculties of Mankind, did highly recommend themselves to our Belief; so, on the other Hand, they had an immediate Relation to Practice; and were the genuine Principles and Foundations, upon which all human and divine Virtues were naturally to be superstructed.

The Doctrines which our Saviour delivered, will all of them fall under *one* of these *three* Heads.

They were either in order to the clearing, improving, and confirming the great Truths of natural Religion, without which a Virtuous, Holy Life could not be led.

Or

Or they were in order to the removing of those erroneous wicked Principles out of the Minds of Men, that then commonly prevailed in the World, and were great Hindrances and Obstructions of true Virtue and Piety.

Or lastly, They were such as contained new Arguments, new Encouragements, new Engagements to put us upon the Practice of Holiness, that Mankind never thought of before. And of this last Sort were those Doctrines which we call the peculiar Articles of the Christian Faith; as namely, the infinite Love of God to Mankind, expressed in sending his own Son for their Redemption: That Son of God's offering up of himself as a Sacrifice for the Sins of the World, and thereby sealing a Covenant of Pardon and Reconciliation to all true Penitents that believe in him: That Son of God's being afterwards raised from the Dead, and carried up into Heaven, to appear there as a perpetual Advocate and Intercessor for us at the right Hand of God; and at the same Time sending down his Holy Spirit, as his Vicegerent upon Earth, to maintain and promote his Cause and Religion in the World; and by his inward Influences, to assist all *Christ's* faithful Disciples in their Endeavours after Virtue: And lastly, that Son of God's coming down again from Heaven at the End of the World, to judge both
both

both the Quick and the Dead, according to their Works done in the Flesh; and to reward all good Men with Eternal Life and Happiness, and to punish all bad Men in Hell-fire, prepared for the Devil and his Angels.

This now is the Sum of those Doctrines that were delivered by our Saviour: And as to all, and every one of them, I ask, whether they be not truly practical Doctrines? Whether the whole Scope and Design of them be not to make Men good? Nay, lastly, Whether in these Doctrines there be not a more powerful, a more effectual Method laid down for the reforming Human Nature, and obliging the whole World to forsake their Sins, and to lead Holy and Virtuous Lives, than was ever taught before, nay, or than was possible to have been contrived by all the Wit of Mankind.

By what I have now said it plainly appears, how groundless the Pretence of those Men is, who would explode the Doctrine of the Blessed *Trinity* out of the Christian Religion, as being a mere Metaphysical Speculation, and nothing at all tending to the promoting of Piety and Virtue among Men. For as that Doctrine is delivered by our Saviour, it is certainly so far from being a Matter of mere Speculation, that it is the great

Founda-

Foundation of, and the greatest Engagement to a virtuous holy Life, that was possible to be given. We own it is a *Mystery*, and a great one, but not an useless speculative Mystery, but a *Mystery of Godliness*, as the Apostle styles it. God Almighty did not reveal that Mystery to us as a Piece of Philosophy, for the filling our Heads with new sublime Notions about his Nature, but as a Principle or Hypothesis, absolutely necessary for the right understanding the Structure and Contrivance of the Gospel Dispensation; wherein, discovering in how wonderful a manner, each Person in the Divine Essence, was severally engaged in the great Affair of bringing Men into Repentance, we might, in the *First* Place, have abundant Reason to embrace and adhere to that Religion, in which alone, of all the Religions in the World, was a Method discovered of reconciling Men to God, without Injury to any of the Divine Attributes, or Violence done to the Liberty of Man's Will: And *Secondly*, might have the strongest Engagements imaginable, seriously to set ourselves upon the great Work of the Reformation of our Lives; for the effecting of which both Father, Son, and Holy Ghost had so zealously, and with such astonishing Condescension, concerned themselves.

When

When we therefore consider the Doctrine of the *Holy Trinity*, as an Article of the *Christian Faith*, we are not barely to consider it, as it denotes or expresses *Three Eternal, Divine Persons, subsisting in one Divine Nature*; much less are we to trouble our Heads with the manner of the Emanation of one Person from another, and other such Things (with their curious Enquiries into, and Definitions about which, some, it is to be feared, instead of clearing, have rather obscured and perplexed that sacred Mystery) but we are to consider this Mystery, as the holy Scripture proposeth it, namely, every Person as conversant about, and co-operating in the Work of our Redemption: GOD the *Father* as having an infinite Compassion and Kindness for lost Mankind, and thereupon sending his Son to restore them: GOD the *Son* as taking human Nature upon him, that by his *Life* he might both instruct us in GOD's Will, and be to us an Example of Living; and by his *Death* he might make a Propitiation for our Sins: And *lastly*, GOD the *Holy Ghost*, as sent into the Hearts of all Believers, to be a new Principle in them of a divine Life; to assist all well-disposed Persons with his Grace to the End of the World, in the subduing their Corruptions, and in the Performance of all that Obedience which *Christ* had required of them.

And

And certainly, the Doctrine of the *Trinity* thus believed, thus considered, is a Foundation of Piety, with a witness: A Doctrine that carries in it the strongest Arguments that can possibly be made use of to a reasonable Nature, to oblige us to give up ourselves entirely to the Service of God.

But, in the *Third Place*, pass we from the *Doctrines* our Saviour taught, to the *Life* he lived in the World; which will afford us another undeniable Proof of the Point we are upon: For whoever considers the Particulars of that Life, as it is recorded in the Gospels, cannot but be convinced, that it was wholly framed to the Purposes of teaching universal Virtue to Mankind, by giving us a most lively, and yet a most imitable Example of all the Branches of it.

The Life that our blessed Lord led upon Earth, was full of Innocence and Simplicity, free from all manner of Guile, and from the least Suspicion of Vice, or any Thing that looked like it. There was nothing in his Temper, or in his Conversation, that favoured of Sourness, or Churlishness; of Vain-glory, or Ambition, or Self-seeking; of the Love of Pleasure, or of the Love of the World. On the contrary, he was the reverse of all these; being the modestest, the humblest, the best natured, the most self-denying, and disin-

disinterested Man that ever appeared in the World. He had no Views in any of his Actions, but the pure Glory of God, and the Good of Mankind. He was dead to the World while he lived in it; very well pleased and contented with his low Condition; extremely devout towards God, and conversing much with him by Prayer and Meditation, and yet making that no Pretence of neglecting the Business of his Calling. He bore Injuries and Affronts with the greatest Meekness, though he was a Person of the highest Quality in the World. Patient he was to Admiration under unheard of Sufferings, and not only ready to forgive his Enemies, but to oblige them all the Ways they were capable.

It would be endless to pursue all the Instances of that glorious Virtue, in which our Saviour shined forth as *a Light to the Paths, and a Lantern to the Feet* of all the Ages and Generations of the World. I shall therefore here only desire Leave to take Notice, how exquisitely the Circumstances of our Saviour's Life were contrived, for the rendering him every Way a compleat and proper Example of Virtue to the Sons of Men. And there are *two* Particulars especially that make hither.

First, His chusing the Life of a private ordinary Person. Had he appeared in the

the Quality, and with the Equipage of a Prince, or some such illustrious Personage (as indeed the *Jews* expected such a one for their *Messias*) and framed his Manners and Conversation according to that Character; the Virtues and Graces he must then have chiefly exercised, would not have been imitable by much the greater Part of Mankind; as who, being placed in a quite different Sphere, must also have different Patterns and Precedents to frame their Lives by; and consequently, the Benefit of his Example would have redounded, comparatively, but to a few. Besides, that State of Life would not have led him to Opportunities of exemplifying several Virtues, which the Generality of Mankind have the most frequent Occasions for; and for the obtaining of which, by reason of their extreme Difficulty, they most stand in need of the Guidance and Encouragement of an Example. Such, for Instance, are, Contentedness in a mean Fortune, a continual Dependence on God's Providence; patient Suffering of Injuries and Persecutions, with several of the like Nature. But now our Saviour appearing as he did, in lowly and common Circumstances, in that Rank and Quality, into which the Lot of the greatest Part of Men is cast; and therein continually conflicting with all those Difficulties and Temptations, to which the

Condi-

Condition of human Life is most exposed; he rendered himself hereby an Example of the most universal Influence, such a Copy of Virtue, as the Necessities of Mankind did most require should be given them to write after.

Again, secondly, what I have observed as to the outward Condition of our Saviour's Life, the same, and to the same Purposes, I observe of his Virtues. They were indeed, perfect in the highest Degree; but yet the Instances of them were very ordinary and very familiar, complying with human Society, and proportioned to the Strength and Capacities of all Men. There was nothing of Prodigy in his Conversation: Nothing that by its Greatness and too much Lustre, might rather dazle our Eyes than guide us; rather scare our Endeavours than encourage them. And herein differs the Story of our Lord from that of several of his Followers and Disciples in After-times: Whose Lives, as they are related to us, are rather fit to fright and amaze us, to ensnare and create Scruples in us, than to conduct us in the Ways of an even and regular Piety. But our Saviour's Life was nothing so. We do not find him forward in those prodigious Mortifications, those long and tedious Abstractions of Spirit, those strange Instances of uncommanded Charity, with which the Legends

gends of the Saints are stuffed : But in all the Actions, in which he did propose himself imitable by us, he did so converse with Men, that Men might with Ease and Pleasure, and without the least Prejudice to their secular Affairs, converse in the World after his Example. In a word, his whole Life was perfectly framed to a Conformity with his Doctrine, and Articles of Faith. As these were fitted to every Man's Understanding, so was that fitted for every one's Imitation.

Nay, let me add this farther, His very Miracles and inimitable Actions were also framed, as much as was possible, for the carrying on this Design: For they were all of such a Quality, that they did not only evidence the Divine Authority of his Religion to Mens Understandings, which was one great End of them, but did also powerfully recommend Goodness and Charity to their Practices. We might in them, at the same time, discover both the Truth of Christianity, and the Spirit and Temper of it: For, it is observable of all the great and wonderful Works that our Saviour wrought, that they were not meer Signs and Prodigies, such as the carnal *Jews* hankered after, but Actions of Beneficence to Mankind; illustrious Expressions of the most large and diffusive Charity. He never exerted that divine Power that was

in him, but to the Ends of benefiting some Person or other. His constant Course of Miracles was but a continual going about doing Good.

And herein remarkably appears the Difference between our Saviour's Miracles, and those of *Moses* and *Elias*; the one the Author, the other the great Restorer of the *Jewish* Law. Theirs were for the most part vindicative and destructive; dreadful Plagues and Judgments upon Gain-sayers; Waters from the Deep to drown them, and Fire from Heaven to consume them; and this, suitably enough to the Nature and Genius of that Dispensation, to which they did hereby gain Authority. But our Saviour, who came to infuse another kind of Spirit into Mankind, chose to confirm his Religion by Miracles of Mercy; by healing the Sick, feeding the Hungry, opening the Eyes of the Blind, casting out Devils, and raising dead People to Life again: Plainly hereby making us to understand, that the great Business of his Religion was, to make Men kind and good-natur'd; and to produce in them all the Fruits of an useful and charitable Conversation; and this in a Degree far higher than either the Law of *Moses*, or any other Religion in the World did oblige Men to.

And

And thus much for our Saviour's Life and Example, which was the *third* Head I was to speak to: As for the *two* remaining Parts of his History, which I mentioned as farther Proofs of the Point we are upon, I shall not now meddle with them, having (I fear) been too tedious already; and therefore I only beg Leave to draw two short Inferences from what hath been said, and I shall conclude.

And *First*, if this Account we have given of the Ends of *Christ's* Manifestation in the Flesh be a true one; then we may learn what Judgment we are to make of all such Doctrines and Opinions, as do either directly teach Vice, and Profaneness, and careless Living, or by necessary Consequence open a Door to it: Of all such Doctrines as dispose a Man to believe, either that Holiness of Life is not necessary to Salvation, or at least not so necessary, but that there may be Ways found out to supply the Want of it: Of all such Doctrines as do check and discourage Men's Endeavours after Universal Virtue, either by representing it unto them, as a Thing unattainable in this Life; or by filling their Minds with hard, and unworthy, and penurious Thoughts of God and his Goodness: Of all such Doctrines as tend to extinguish the inward Life and Spirit of Religion, by turning it into Customari-

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ness,

ness, or Formality, or Superstition : In a Word, of all those Doctrines that do any way hinder or obstruct good Life. For 'tis certain we may affirm of all such, that they are not of GOD; that *Christ* never taught them; that the Holy Scripture, in the true Sense of it, cannot possibly own them, as being directly contradictory to the great Design and Intendment of it, which, as we have seen, is to plant in Men all manner of Virtue and holy Conversation.

This is an excellent Rule to examine the Truth of religious Opinions by, and may be of great Use for the guiding our Judgments as to many Points, which are with great Eagerness disputed among *Christians* at this Day : And I mention it, not without a particular Reflection upon many of the Doctrines taught in the Church of *Rome*; and upon some likewise, that are too much propagated among our selves (though, GOD be thanked, never owned by our Church) both of which Sorts, if they be brought to this Test, will appear manifestly false and Unchristian; as being either apparently contrived to serve a secular Turn; or if not that, yet all of them, directly, or by necessary Consequence, encouraging Men in a careless or a vicious Life.

But,

But, *Secondly*, since the End and Design of our Lord's coming into the World is such as hath been said ; then, in the Name of GOD, *let every one that names the Name of Christ depart from all Iniquity.* This is the most natural Inference that can be drawn from this Doctrine.

All of us here present do call our selves *Christians*; nay, and I believe, would take it ill of any one that should think otherwise of us. For GOD's sake then, let us make it appear that we are so, by living up to the Design of our *Christianity*. Let us shew that we are indeed the Disciples of *Christ*, by walking as we have him for an Example: Let us make all the World see, that we believe his Doctrines, by conforming our selves to his Precepts: That we fear his Threatnings, by flying every Thing that is base and sinful: That we expect his Rewards in the other World, by living above the Vanities of this: Let our constant and vigorous Pursuit of every Thing that is good, of every Thing that is just, of every Thing that is lovely, that is venerable, that is of good Report, bear Witness for us, to what Master, and to what Religion we do belong.

There is no other Way but this to evidence, that we are indeed what we

pretend to be. It is not sufficient to entitle us to the Name of *Christians*, that we were baptized into *Christ*, that we profess his Faith, that we rest upon him for Salvation, that we are Members of an Orthodox Church: No; what St. *Paul* said of *Circumcision*, the same may be said of *Baptism*, and all those other Things (I use the Words of a late eminent Divine of our Church) “*They do verily profit, if we keep the Law*” “*of Christ: but if we be Transgressors of*” “*thar Law, our Baptism is no Baptism,*” “*our Faith is mere Infidelity, our Chri-*” “*stianity is no better than Heathenism.*” Nay further, I will be bold to say, There is not a *Turk*, or a *Heathen*, but, if he live better than we, if he be more innocent, more chaste, more humble, more just, more charitable than we, he is to all Intents and Purposes a better *Christian*; forasmuch as he lives more up to the Ends of *Christ*’s Religion. And a thousand Times rather would I chuse to appear at the last Day, before the great Tribunal of God, in the Person of such a poor Infidel, than in the Condition of the most Orthodox *Christian*, if he soil and unhallow his Profession by a vicious Life. God Almighty touch all our Hearts with a Sense of these Things, and grant that *that Grace* of his, *which* as on this Day hath appear’d unto Men, may effectually

fectually teach every one of us to deny Ungodliness and worldly Lusts, and to live righteously, and soberly, and godly in this present World, looking for the blessed Hope, and the Second and more Glorious Appearance of the Great G O D, and our Saviour, To whom, &c.



SERMON VIII.

Preached before the

QUEEN

A T

St. JAMES's Chapel,

On EASTER DAY, 1705.

ACTS X. 40, 41.

*Him God raised up the third Day,
and shewed him openly;
Not to all the People, but unto Wit-
nesses, chosen before of God; even to
us, who did Eat and Drink with
him after he rose from the Dead.*

THE Solemnity of this Day lead-
ing me to treat of something re-
lating to our Lord's Resurrection
from the Dead, I shall beg Leave at this
time to give an Account of one Cir-
cumstance

cumstance of it, which is not commonly insisted on in the Discourses upon this Argument; but which yet is looked upon by some (who are glad of any Sort of Weapons, tho' never so slight ones, wherewith they may attack the Christian Religion) to contain a strong Objection against the Sufficiency of the Proof we have of that great *Article* of our *Faith*. It is that which is here told us by *St. Peter*, in the Words I have now read unto you; namely, That when *God raised up our Lord Jesus on the Third Day, and shewed him to be alive, he did not shew him to all the People, but only to chosen Witnesses appointed by God for that Purpose.*

It is certain that *Christ's Resurrection* is the great fundamental *Article* of *Christianity*. Our whole Religion stands or falls with it. *If Christ be not risen, then is our Preaching vain, and your Faith is also vain,* as *St. Paul* tells us. And therefore this Point, above all others, ought to have such a Proof and Attestation, as is clear, and full, and convincing, and liable to no Exception or Evasion; forasmuch as whatever shakes the Credit of this, shakes the Credit of our whole Religion.

Now we *Christians* do say, and we have the greatest Reason in the World to say it, That we have as good Proof of *Christ's Resurrection* as any Man can reason-

reasonably desire. We have such an Attestation of it, as none can justly except against: For we have the constant agreeing Testimony of several credible Witnesses, to whom our Saviour shewed himself alive after his Crucifixion, and with whom he did Eat and Drink for several Days together, and in whose Presence he did visibly ascend up into Heaven. And we have that Testimony authentickly conveyed down to us; and confirmed likewise with all the Sorts of Evidence that any Matter of Fact, done at the same Distance of Time from us that this was, is capable of.

Well, but to this it is objected, That these Witnesses we speak of, were all of them *Christ's* Friends, and Followers, and Dependents. There are no Witnesses produced of his Resurrection, but such as were his own Disciples, such as had espoused his Interest, and were of his Party, and consequently were bound, right or wrong, to keep up his Reputation in the World. If *Christ* did indeed rise from the Dead, and meant to give sufficient unsuspected Evidence to Mankind of that his Resurrection, 'twas fit that he should have appear'd after his Death to Men of all Sorts, to his Enemies, as well as to his Friends; to those that did not believe his Religion, as well as to those that did. But yet we find that he shewed himself only to his own Followers,

lowers, and conversed with none but them, not at all with the unbelieving *Jews* or *Romans*: And this is owned by the Apostles themselves. *St. Peter*, here in my Text, when he preached *Christ's* Resurrection to *Cornelius*, confessing and declaring, that when *GOD* raised up *Jesus* on the Third Dy, and shewed him openly, yet it was not to all the People, but to *Witnesses* chosen before of *GOD*, even his own Apostles, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the Dead.

This is, indeed, one of the strongest Objections that is brought against the Article of *Christ's* Resurrection; and it is not a new one; for *Celsus* particularly, *Fifteen hundred Years* ago, urged it against the *Christians*, as *Origen* acquaints us. My Business, at this time, shall be to consider it, and to give a fair Account of this Matter. And here I have *three* or *four* Particulars to lay before you, which if they be well consider'd, will convince any reasonable Man, that how plausibly soever this Objection looks at the first Sight, yet there is nothing in the World in it, but it is all meer Cavil.

I. And *First* of all, let it be considered, that tho' it be true what *St. Peter* here tells us, that when *GOD* raised up our Lord from the Dead, *he did not shew him to all the People*: Yet it is not true which is supposed

posed in the Objection, that there were no other Witnesses of *Christ's* Resurrection, but only his own Disciples: For the Soldiers that were placed by the *Jewish* Magistrates, to guard the Sepulchre after they had sealed it up, were Witnesses of the whole Transaction, as St. *Matthew* informs us. It is not indeed said, that they saw our Lord *Jesus* after he was risen; but they were sensible of the Earthquake which preceded his Resurrection: And they saw the Angel that came down from Heaven, and rolled away the Stone from the Door of the Sepulchre, and thereupon were struck with such Terror, that they became as dead Men: And they saw likewise, that his Body was missing in the Grave; as appears by the Account they gave of these Things to their Masters, who thereupon bribed them with large Sums of Money, to give out that ridiculous Story, that whilst they were asleep, his Disciples came and stole away his Body: As if it was credible, either that *Sixty* Men that were set to watch (for so many, they tell us, a *Roman Custodia* consisted of) could all be asleep at once; or if they were, that they could give an Account of what was done while they slept.

But pray what sort of Man was St. *Paul* when our Saviour *first* appeared to him (for he appeared to him oftner than once) in that astonishing Manner that is
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set down in the *Ninth* of the *Acts*, when he and all his Company were struck to the Ground by that glorious unsupportable Light that surrounded them? Was he then one of *Christ's* Followers or Disciples? So far from that, that *he breathed forth nothing but Threatnings and Slaughter against all that were of that Way*, and was at that very Time going to *Damascus*, with a Commission from the *Jewish Sanhedrim*, to bring bound to *Jerusalem* all, both Men and Women, that believed on our Lord *Jesus Christ*. There were then other Witnesses of our Saviour's Resurrection, besides his own Disciples. That is the *First* Thing.

II. But, *Secondly*, tho' there had been no other Witnesses of *Christ's* Resurrection than his own Followers, yet their Testimony was to all Intents and Purposes sufficient to ascertain all reasonable Men to the World's end, of the Truth of the Matter of Fact; nor is there any possible Objection against it: As will appear, if we consider either the *Number* of the Witnesses, or the Manner of *Christ's* Appearance to them, or the *Times* of it, or the *Quality* of the Persons, or the no Reason they had to abuse the World with such a Report, if it had been false; or *lastly*, the other Evidence, besides their own Word, that they gave of the Truth of it.

For

For their *Number*, they were many, both Men and Women, even some Hundreds, that our Saviour shewed himself Alive to, after he had been put to Death.

For the *Manner* of shewing himself to them, it was the most convincing that could be. He did not appear to them one by one, but to Multitudes of them together, even to *Five hundred Brethren at once*, as St. Paul tells us, 1 Cor. xv. of whom the greatest Part were alive at the Time when he wrote that Epistle. Nor did he shew himself to his Disciples, by only giving them a Glimpse of him, or just appearing to them, and then vanishing; but he conversed with them; he eat and drank with them; he exposed himself to be felt and handled by them.

For the *Times*, it was not once or twice, but frequently, for the space of *forty Days*; at the End of which he led them out to the Mount of *Olives*, and there, in their Presence, did he visibly ascend up into Heaven.

For the *Quality* of the Witnesses, and the *Matter* they gave Testimony to; there was no possible Suspicion, either of their being deceived themselves, or deceiving others. The *Persons* were plain, simple, illiterate Men, and the most unfit in the World for the carrying on such an Impos-
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sture, if this had been one. The *Matter* that they gave Testimony to, was a plain Matter of Fact, obvious to all their Senses; and let them have had never so little *Wit*, yet if they had but *Honesty*, their Testimony concerning it might be rely'd on. And, that they had *Honesty*, appears beyond all Exception from this; That no Promises or Threatnings could work upon them to depart from their Evidence; but notwithstanding all the Sufferings they underwent upon account thereof, they continued constant to the Death, in maintaining to all the World, that *Jesus* was risen from the Dead.

That they had no Inducement to be thus constant in their Testimony, but the Obligations that their own Consciences laid upon them, is abundantly plain: For what Advantage in the World could they expect to themselves from their persisting in such a Story as this, if it had been an Untruth? Why nothing but Hatred, and Reproaches, and Infamy, and Persecution, and Loss of Goods, and of Life itself: This was all the Reward they were to hope for from the World.

And this Consideration alone, if it be well attended to, will quite take away the Ground of the whole Objection. The main Force of the Objection lies here; That the Witnesses of *Christ's* Resurrection were his Friends, of his own Party, and

and consequently were bound to keep up his Reputation among Men, right or wrong; and therefore their single Testimony ought not to be rely'd on. Now it must be confessed, this Circumstance would have occasioned some Suspicion in other Cases, where it was apparent some worldly Design was carried on; or where there was a Prospect of Riches, or Power, or some other temporal Advantage to be attained by the successful Management of an Intrigue: But there is nothing of this to be pretended in this Case of *Christ's* Witnesses. If *Christ* did not rise from the Dead, they had a World of Reasons and Inducements to have deserted both him and his Religion: But they had none to make such a gross Lie for his sake, how much soever they had been his Friends before. Nay, so far from that, that as I said, it was against all their Worldly Interests to own his Resurrection, tho' they were never so much convinced that he did really rise from the Dead. As Things then stood, nothing but a Sense of their Duty could have put them upon it, how well soever he had deserved of them. They must be very *good Friends*, and very *honest* and *sincere* Men too, that will venture all they are worth in this World, and their Lives to boot, for the sake of their Friend, even while he is alive; and tho' the
Cause

Cause they appear in, on his Behalf, be never so just. But is it credible; nay, is it possible to be conceived, that such a Number of Men should have had such a Kindness for a *Friend*; a Friend too that was *Dead*, and from whom they could hope for nothing; nay a Friend too that had been most *unfriendly* to them, in having most grossly deluded them: I say, is it possible (as Human Nature is Constituted) that so many Men, for the Sake of such a Person, would forge so monstrous a Lye, as his rising from the Dead, and stand to it too; when they not only got nothing by the Cheat, but exposed themselves thereby to all the Miseries that Mankind can endure?

But, *Lastly*, The Evidence of *Christ's* Resurrection did not so much depend upon the bare Testimony of these Witnesses, as upon other Proofs they gave of the Truth of it: For those Men that preached *Christ's* Resurrection, gave Demonstration of the Truth of the Matter of Fact, by the Works that they themselves wrought.

For here was the Case. *Christ*, when he departed from his Apostles, to go up into Heaven, told them, that he had appointed them to be his *Witnesses*, not only in *Judea* and *Samaria*, but to the uttermost *Parts of the Earth*: But they must not enter upon that Office, till they had their

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Credentials; and therefore he bids them stay at *Jerusalem* till they were endued with *Power from on high*. Ten Days after this, the Holy Ghost descends upon them in a visible Manner, and that in a full Assembly. Upon this they every one began to speak in Languages that they never had been Taught, to the great Amazement of vast Numbers of People of several Nations, who, upon the Rumour of this, flocked thither. Then were they qualified to preach *Christ's* Resurrection. And they did so: And to confirm the Truth of it, they wrought all Sorts of Miracles. They cur'd all Diseases: Nay, they themselves raised the Dead to Life again. Nay, not only this, but they communicated the same Power of working Miracles to all those they laid their hands upon. And all these mighty Wonders they solemnly did avow, they performed by the Power of *Jesus Christ*, who was crucified at *Jerusalem*, and who was now Alive at the Right Hand of God. What now was the Effect of all this? Why ~~wherever~~ wherever they came, they brought over Multitudes, both of *Jews* and *Gentiles*, to the Faith of *Jesus Christ*. One of these Witnesses (*St. Peter* by Name) by one Sermon converted *Three Thousand*. By another Sermon he converted *Five Thousand*. And within a very few Years (less than *Forty*) by the Preaching of these *Witnesses*, and the mighty

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mighty Signs and Wonders they wrought, was Christianity spread throughout the World; and continues so to this very Day.

Now can any reasonable Man desire greater Evidence for any Matter of Fact, than all these Particulars I have mentioned will amount to, for the Matter of Fact of our Saviour's Resurrection? Nay, I add farther, was ever any other Matter of Fact in the World better attested than this is?

III. And if this Evidence be sufficient, then all that remains in the Objection will very easily be answered. For, in the *Third* Place, what is pretended, that *Christ* ought in Reason to have given Proof of his Resurrection to all about him promiscuously, and not to have confined his Appearance and Conversation to a select Number; is very unreasonable. For, was this Way of Proceeding necessary for the Convincing the World of the Truth of *Christ's* Resurrection; or was it not necessary? If it was not necessary, why is it urged? If it was necessary; then that very Thing which the Objection would have *Christ* to have done, if he had done it, would not have been sufficient, but he must have done more. For by the same Reason or Argument that any Man can prove, that it was necessary for the ascertaining Men of *Christ's* Resurrection, that he should

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have appeared to all about him, to all in the City where he rose; by the same Reason it may be proved, that it was necessary he should have appeared to all the *Jews* in the Land of *Canaan*; nay, not only so, but to all the *Roman Empire*: For otherwise they would have had the same cause of objecting against his Resurrection, that is now brought; namely, that the Thing was a Plot of the *Jewish* Nation, for the bringing in one of their own Country to be worshiped as a God throughout the World. Nay, farther upon this Principle, it would have been necessary for *Christ* to have shewed himself in Person, not only to all that lived at that Time, but to all of the several succeeding Ages, even to this Day.

The Argument therefore of the Objection proves too much, and therefore it proves nothing at all. The plain Design of it is, to take away the Credit of all such Testimony as is given by a select Number of Witnesses. And if that be once admitted, then the Consequence will be this, That we can have no good Evidence of the Truth of Matter of Fact, but Evidence of *Sense*. And though we have *Christ* and his Apostles witnessing to us, and a Thousand Witnesses more, with the Rich Man in the Parable, *we will not be persuaded, unless one rise from the Dead*, and appear to us.

IV. And

IV. And therefore, *Fourthly*, taking it for granted, that the Witnesses of *Christ's* Resurrection could not be such a determinate Number of Men (for otherwise, he must have appear'd to all Mankind) the Question is, what kind of Men *Christ* should have chosen for this Purpose; his *Friends*, or his *Enemies*? The Objection saith, Both; but we say there is no Reason in the World for it. His *Enemies* having so long been obstinate in their Unbelief, notwithstanding all the Arguments, and all the Miracles he had given them for their Conviction, had render'd themselves utterly unworthy of such a Favour. Ay, but (it will be said) *Christ's* Appearance from the Dead to them, would have convinced them of their Error. Supposing that; yet still it was not fit, that God should convert them after that Manner. According to the Methods, in which he deals with Mankind, Faith and Religion is to be a Virtue, a Thing of Choice, and not the Effect of uncontrollable Demonstration. If they had had sufficient Means for the enlightening their Understanding before, and yet had rejected them, as they did, there was no Reason that they should have new and greater Means used with them; such Means, as the Force of which they could not resist. If this was reasonable; then it is reasonable, that every Atheist, or Unbe-

Unbeliever now among us, that is not persuaded by the common standing Arguments of Religion, should expect a Miracle for his Conversion. But this Kind of Proceeding is to do a Sort of Violence to Mens Natures, and to take away all the Praise and all the Reward of being Religious.

But indeed it is not so certain, that those Men that had resisted all *Christ's* Preaching and Miracles, and had afterwards most inhumanly crucified him, would have been brought over to the Belief of him, though he had appeared to them from the Dead. On the contrary, those that could impute his Wonderful and Divine Works that he wrought in his Life, to *Magic*, and Confederacy with the Devil, in all Reason would have given the same Account of this his Appearance after he was Dead. For some Men are so far gone in Vice and Wickedness, that even a *Demonstration*, or *one from the Dead*, will not bring them to a Sense of their Errors.

Now supposing this to be the Case; I am sure such Men as these were by no Means fit to be put among the *Witnesses chosen of God*, to whom our Saviour should shew himself Alive after his Death: Because such Witnesses as these would have done his Cause more Hurt, than ever they would have done it Good.

Since

Since therefore there was of Necessity to be a set particular Number of Witnesses for the Attesting our Saviour's Resurrection to the World, it was infinitely fit for the gaining Credit to their Testimony, that great Care should be taken in the Choice of them. And if so; who were fitter to be pitch'd upon for that Employment, than those that were all known, tried, honest Men, and who had attended upon our Lord during all the Time of his Publick Ministry, and so were perfectly well acquainted both with his Life and his Doctrine, as well as with the Truth of his Resurrection? And Lastly, Who would so firmly persist in their Testimony, that they would not scruple to undergo any Sufferings, nay, even Death itself, for so good a Cause. And such a Choice as this our Lord did make; and such a Choice, all Men that consider Things seriously, cannot but allow to be Reasonable.

I cannot think of any Thing that can be farther objected upon this Argument, unless it be this: That though it was not fit our Saviour should vouchsafe that Kindness to his *Enemies* and *Crucifiers*, as to appear to them; yet, at least, he ought to have chosen some other Witnesses, besides his own *Disciples*, of his Resurrection; some Persons that were indifferent, that were

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neither engaged for him, or against him.

Well, Let this be admitted as a reasonable Thing: But in Answer to it, I say, That for any thing we know to the contrary, *Christ* did make such a Choice of his Witnesses: For of those *Five Hundred Brethren* that *St. Paul* tells us our Saviour appeared to at once, several of them might not be *Brethren*, might not be *Christians* before his Appearance to them, but might be converted by that Appearance: So that at the Time of that Appearance, they might be indifferent to him and his Religion, though they were not so afterward.

But whether it were so or no, it matters not: For it will be one and the same Thing as to the Event, and consequently the Objection will be idle and frivolous. For let us put this Question: Would we have had these *Indifferent*, *Unconcerned* Persons, to whom we wish *Christ* had appeared after his Resurrection, and appointed them Witnesses of it? I say, would we have had them, after this Appearance, to continue in this *Indifferency* and *Unconcernedness*, or would we not? If we would, then we would have them to continue Infidels and Unbelievers, notwithstanding *Christ's* Resurrection, which they were Eye Witnesses of. But upon this Supposition, what Service were they like

like to do the Christian Cause by their Testimony? This Sort of Persons were like to prove *rare* Preachers of the Gospel to others, who though they own'd *Christ's* Resurrection, yet did not believe his Doctrines. But on the other Side, if we would have all these *Indifferent, Unconcerned* Men upon the Evidence of Sense that they had of *Christ's* Resurrection, to be convinced thereby, that he was a true Prophet sent from God, and upon that Conviction to become his Disciples; then the whole Objection we have been so long upon, vanisheth into Nothing: For the Thing is admitted that we have been all this while contending for; namely, That every one that is qualified to be a Witness of *Christ's* Resurrection, must be a Convert to his Religion; and none could do any Service to his Cause, but those that were such. And certainly this is true: And the more you consider it, the more you will be convinced of it. And if you turn over in your Thoughts all the Ways that can be imagined concerning ~~this~~ Business, you will find that the Way that God chose for the Testifying his Son's Resurrection, both to the present Generation, and to future Ages, was the best, was the wisest, was the least exceptionable, was the most effectual for the gaining Credit to it, of any that can be thought of.

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And thus much let it suffice to have spoken touching my Text and the Objection that is taken from thence against our Lord's Resurrection. All that I shall do farther is to draw *Two* or *Three* Useful Lessons from this great Article of our Faith; for our Instruction, and for our Comfort, and for the awakening 'us to a Sense of our Duty, and this by Way of Application.

And in the *First* Place, taking it for granted, that our Saviour's Resurrection is sufficiently and unexceptionably attested, we have hereby the greatest Assurance given to us of the Truth of the Christian Religion, that we can possibly wish or desire: For it is the strongest and most indubitable Seal, that God could set to the Verity of all our Saviour's Doctrines. It being utterly impossible (as being inconsistent with God's Veracity, who cannot set his Seal to a Lye) that if *Jesus* had been any other than what he pretended to be, namely, the Son of God, and the Saviour of the World, God would have raised him again to Life, and taken him up into Heaven: Especially, our Saviour having more than once publicly declared before-hand, that after he was put to Death, he would thus rise again; and gave that as a Sign to the *Jews*, that he was no Impostor, but a true Prophet sent from God.

Secondly,

Secondly, Another Consequence of our Saviour's Resurrection, is, That we have thereby the greatest Demonstration given us of the Certainty of Future Rewards in another World: Which is the great Argument that must prevail upon the Spirits of degenerate Mankind, to pursue the Paths of Virtue and Holiness. For by this Men might be clearly convinced that there was another Life after this, since they had their own Senses to Witness it: He that was once Dead and Buried, now Living again, and visibly Ascending up into Heaven: And the same Person that now liv'd again, had told them before, that all those that believed on him, should be raised up again at the last Day, by that Spirit which raised him. What more could be thought of for the assuring us of a Heavenly Inheritance, if we be good *Christians*, than this? And what can more powerfully engage us seriously to endeavour to be such, than the Consideration of that Heavenly Inheritance?

But *Thirdly* and Lastly, Another Effect or Consequence of *Christ's* Resurrection, is, That thereby God hath declared him to be the Judge both of the Quick and the Dead. This *St. Paul* tells us in the xviith of the *Acts*; God (saith he) now commandeth all Men every where to repent; because he hath appointed a Day in which he will

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will judge the World in Righteousness, by that Man whom he hath ordained, of which he hath given Assurance unto all Men, in that he hath raised him from the Dead. And this is the Point that St. Peter likewise, here in my Text, takes care to inculcate to Cornelius, when he preach'd *Christ's Resurrection* to him. *Him* (saith he) *GOD raised up the Third Day, and shewed him openly, &c. And he commanded us to Preach to the People, and to testify that it is He who is Ordained of GOD to be the Judge of Quick and Dead.* And Lastly, This is that which the Angels declared to the Apostles while they were looking stedfastly towards Heaven as our Saviour ascended thither: *Why stand ye* (say they) *gazing up into Heaven? This same Jesus which is taken up from you into Heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into Heaven.*

O what Confusion will this be to all Unbelievers and impenitent Sinners, when they shall see that very Person whom they thought so meanly of, and whose Offers of Salvation they often despised, appearing in the Clouds with *Ten Thousand* Glorious Angels about him, and coming in the most Terrible Manner that can be imagined, to call them to Account for their Lives past, and to execute Judgment upon all Ungodly Men!

They will not then any longer (with the Scoffers that St. Peter tells us shall be

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in the Last Days) say, *Where is the Promise of his coming?* for we see that all Things continue as they were from the beginning of the Creation: For they shall be convinced, that however his Coming was for good Reasons deferred, yet he shall then come to purpose; to the everlasting Confusion of their Faces, that opposed, or despised, or neglected Him and his Religion.

Then shall they say, Yonder He is, whom we slighted, whose Religion we drolled upon, whose Servants and Followers we took to be no better than a Company of credulous Fools. Lo, yonder He is in the Clouds, whose Tenders of Mercy we have refused, whose Counsels we have rejected, to whose Spirit we have done despight, whose *Sides we have often pierced* by our high Affronts, in as rude a Manner as the *Soldiers* did at *Jerusalem*. Yonder He is; but no longer a *Carpenter's Son*, no longer a *Man of Sorrows*, and *acquainted with Griefs*; no longer a mean obscure *Galilean*; no longer a *Crucified God*; as we in Derision called him: But the Sovereign of Angels, the Judge of Mankind and Devils, and the Lord of all Things both in Heaven and Earth.

On the other Side, this Reflection, that our Lord by his Resurrection is made the Judge of the World, doth not afford Matter of greater *Terror* to his Enemies, than it doth of *Comfort* to his Friends and Followers.

lowers. How must it revive the Heart of every honest *Christian*, and encourage him to go on patiently and chearfully in the Service of his Master, notwithstanding the many Frailties and Infirmities he groans under; notwithstanding the many Slips and Errors, that after his best Endeavours do attend the Course of his Life; to consider that he, who is to take his Accounts at the Last Day, and to pass Sentence upon him, is no other than his Dear Redeemer?

If we look upon the Judgment to come only in this View, that then all the hidden Works of Darkness shall be brought to Light, the Secrets of all Hearts be laid open, the Actions of all Mankind strictly examined and scanned, and Sentence pass upon every one according to his Works done in the Flesh; I say if we have no other View of the last Judgment than only this, it would not be very comfortable to the best of us, who are all Sinners, and therefore cannot plead our Innocence at that great Tribunal. But when we consider farther, That it is our Saviour that shall then sit upon the Throne; that it is our Saviour, to whom God hath committed the Judging of us; our Saviour, I say, that knows our Frame, that is sensible of all the Difficulties we have to conflict with, as having himself in the Days of his Flesh, had sufficient

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Experience of them (*he having been in all Points tempted as we are, only without Sin*) and that this Saviour of ours will not Judge us according to the Rigour of the Law, but according to the Gracious Allowances of the Gospel: The Consideration of this, I say, will prove an effectual Antidote against all the Fears, and Disquietudes, and Despondency we may lie under upon Account of our own Unworthiness.

Let none of us therefore, that heartily own our Lord *Jesus*, and his Religion, and honestly endeavour to live up to the Laws of his Gospel, fright our selves with such Thoughts as these: How shall I, poor Wretch, dare to appear before the Face of my Judge, at the last Day; who have so many greivous Sins to answer for? Let us but go on in the good Course we are in, let us but hold the Profession of our Faith without wavering; and daily apply to the Throne of Grace, for Strength and Assistance against our Corruptions; and to our Prayers add our sincere Endeavours to increase in Virtue; and the longer we live still to grow better: And then I dare say, whatever Sins we may have been guilty of, we shall not need to have any Apprehension or fear of our Condition, upon Account of them, when we come to die; but we may with Confidence appear before the Tribunal of our Lord, and expect our Part in
that

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that Comfortable Sentence which he will at the Last Day pronounce to all his true Disciples and Followers; *Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you, from the Foundation of the World.* To which Kingdom God Almighty bring us all, &c.



A
DISCOURSE
OF
CONSCIENCE,

With Respect to those that separate
from the COMMUNION of the
Church of England, upon the Pre-
sence of it, &c.

THERE is Nothing more in our
Mouths than *Conscience*; and yet
there are few Things we have gene-
rally taken less Pains to understand. We
sit down too often with this, That it is
something *within us*, we do not know what,
which we are to obey in all that it suggests
to us, and we trouble ourselves no further
about it.

By which Means, it frequently comes
to pass, that though we have espoused very
dangerous Errors, or happened to be en-
gaged in very sinful Practices, yet believ-

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ing and acting, as we say, according to our Conscience, we do not only think ourselves perfectly right and safe, while we continue in this State, but are effectually armed against all sorts of Arguments and Endeavours that can be used, for the bringing us to a better Mind.

This is too visible in many Cases; but in none more than in the Case of those that at this Day separate from the *Communion* of the *Church*, as it is established among us. Though the Laws of the Land, both *Ecclesiastical* and *Civil*, do oblige them to join in our *Communion*; though many Arguments are offered to convince them, not only that they lawfully may, but that they are bound to do it; though they themselves are sensible, that manifold and grievous Mischiefs and Dangers do ensue from this Breach of Communions, and these unnatural Divisions, both to the *Christian Religion* in general, and to our *Reformed Religion* in particular; yet, if to all these Things a Man can reply, That he is *satisfied* in his *Conscience* that he doth well in refusing his Obedience to the Laws; or, That he is *not satisfied* in his *Conscience*, that he ought to join with us upon such Terms as are required, this single Pretence shall be often thought a sufficient Answer, both to Laws and Arguments.

A strange Thing this is, that *Conscience*, which, among other Ends, was given to Mankind

Mankind for a Preservative and Security of the publick Peace; for the more effectually obliging Men to Unity, and Obedience to Laws, yet should often be a Means of setting them at distance, and prove a Shelter for Disobedience and Disorder: That God should command us to obey our Governors in all lawful Things, for Conscience-sake, and yet that we should disobey them in lawful Things for Conscience-sake too.

It is the Design of this Discourse to examine what there is in this Plea, that is so often made by our Dissenters, for their not complying with the Laws, *viz. That it is against their Conscience so to do*; and to shew in what Cases this Plea is justly made, and in what Cases not; and where it is justly made, how far it will justify any Man's Separation, and how far it will not. And all this in order to the possessing those who are concerned with a Sense of the great Necessity that lies upon them of using their most serious Endeavours to inform their Conscience aright in these Matters, before they presume to think they can separate from us with a *good Conscience*, which is all we desire of them; for it is not our Business to persuade any Man to conform against his Conscience, but to convince every Man how dangerous *it may be to follow a misinformed Conscience.*

A Discourse of Conscience:

But before I enter upon this Disquisition, it will be necessary, in the *First* Place, to prepare my Way, by laying down the Grounds and Principles I mean to proceed upon. And here, that I may take in all Things that are needful to be known beforehand about this Matter, I shall treat distinctly of these Five Heads.

I. Of the *Nature of Conscience.*

II. Of the *Rule of Conscience.* And under that,

III. Of the *Power of Human Laws to oblige the Conscience.*

IV. And particularly, in the *Instance of Church Communion.*

V. Of the *Authority of Conscience: Or, How far a Man is obliged to be guided by his Conscience in his Actions.*

I. And *First*, As for the *Nature* of Conscience, the truest Way to find out that will be, not so much to enquire into the Signification of the Word *Conscience*, or the several *Scholastical* Definitions of it, as to consider what every Man doth really mean by that Word, when he has occasion to make use of it: For, if it do appear, that all Men do agree in their Notions and Sense about this Matter, that, without doubt, which they all thus agree in, is the true Notion and Sense of *Conscience*.

Now, as to this, we may observe in the *First* Place, that a Man never speaks of his

his *Conscience*, but with respect to *his own Actions*, or to something that hath the Nature of an Action which is done or omitted by him, or is to be done or omitted; Matters of *meer Knowledge* and Speculation we do not concern our *Conscience* with; as neither with those Things in which we are *purely Passive*; as neither with *Actions*, if they be not *our own*. We do not, for Instance, make it a Point of *Conscience*, one Way or other, whether a Thing be true or false; or whether this or the other Accident that befalls us, be prosperous or unfortunate; or whether another Man hath done good or bad Actions, in which we are no way concerned. These kind of Things may indeed prove Matters of great Satisfaction or Disquiet, of Joy or Grief to us; but we do not take our *Conscience* to be affected with them. That Word never comes in, but with respect to something willingly done, or left undone by us; or which we may do, or may forbear.

Secondly, We may observe, that in common Speech we do not neither use this Word *Conscience* about our Actions, but only so far as those Actions fall under a *Moral* Consideration; that is, as they have the Nature of *Duties* or *Sins*, or, as they are *lawful* or *unlawful*. Always when we speak of *Conscience* in our Actions, we have respect to some *Law* or *Rule*, by which those

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those Actions are to be directed and governed, and by their Agreeableness or Disagreeableness with which, they become morally *Good or Evil*.

Thirdly, This being so, the only Thing remaining to be enquired into for the finding out what Conscience is, is what can be reasonably thought to be our Sense and Meaning, when we use the Word *Conscience*, with such Application to our *Actions*, as we have now said. Now for that I desire it may be considered, that when we talk of our *Actions* as we concern our Conscience in them, they can but fall under these two Heads of Distinction; that is to say, in the First Place, we either consider our Actions as *already done or omitted*; or we consider them as *yet not done, but as we are deliberating about them*. And then Secondly, Whether we consider them as done, or not done; as past, or future; yet we rank them under One of these three Notions.

We either look upon them as *Commanded* by GOD, and so to be *Duties*; or as *Forbidden* by GOD, and so to be *Sins*; or as *neither Commanded nor Forbidden*, and so to be *indifferent Actions* (With these last Actions, indeed, Conscience is not properly or directly concerned, but only by Accident, to wit, as those indifferent *Actions* do approach to the Nature of Duties or Sins.) Our Actions, I say, do not touch
our

our Conscience, but as they fall under some of these Heads.

Now, in all these respects we have indeed different Ways of bringing in Conscience, but yet, as it will appear, we mean the same Thing by it in them all.

First of all, when we are considering an Action *as yet not done*, if we look upon it as *Commanded* by GOD, we say, we are *bound in Conscience* to do it; if we look upon it as a *sinful* Action, we say, it is *against our Conscience* to do it; if we look upon it as an *indifferent* Thing, we say, we may do it, or not do it, with a *safe Conscience*. Now, I pray, what do we mean by these Expressions? I desire that every one would consult his own Mind, and deny, if he can, that this is the Sense of his Words. If he saith he is *bound in Conscience* to do this or the other Thing, Whether he doth not mean this; that he verily thinks it his Duty to do that Action? If he saith that it is *against his Conscience* to do such an Action, Whether he means any more than this; that he is persuaded in his Judgment, that to do such an Action is an Offence against GOD? If he saith that he can do it with a *safe Conscience*, Whether he hath any other Meaning than this; that to the best of his Knowledge and Judgment, the Action may be done without transgressing any Law of GOD? This is now undeniably the Sense that every

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Man in the World hath, when he makes Mention of Conscience as to Actions that are not yet done, but only proposed to his Consideration. So that taking Conscience as it respects our *Actions* to be done or omitted, and as it is to govern and conduct them (in which Sense we call Conscience a Guide, or a Monitor, and sometimes, tho' very improperly, a *Rule* of our Actions) it can be nothing else, in the Sense of all Men that use that Word, but a Man's Judgment concerning the Goodness or Badness, the Lawfulness or Unlawfulness of Actions, in order to the Conduct of his own Life.

But Secondly, If we speak of our Actions that are done and past, and consider Conscience with reference to them; here, indeed, we do a little vary the Expression about Conscience, but the Notion of it is the same we have now given. As for instance, when we talk of *Peace of Conscience*, or *Trouble of Conscience*, with reference to some Action we have done or omitted; when we say, *my Conscience bears me Witness*, that I have acted rightly and honestly in this Affair; or my Conscience acquits me from Blame, as to this or to the other Action; or I am troubled in Conscience for doing what I have done: If we turn these Phrases into other Words, we shall find that there is nothing more at the Bottom of them than this; that reflecting upon our

own

own Actions, we find, that in this, or the other Instance, we have either acted or omitted, as we are convinced in our Judgment we ought to do; and the Remembrance of this is some Pleasure and Satisfaction to us; or we have done or forborn something contrary to what we take to be our Duty, and the Remembrance of this affects us with Grief and Trouble. But still, in both these Instances of Expression, that which we mean by Conscience, is the same Thing as in the former Cases, *viz. It is our Judgment and Persuasion concerning what we ought to do, or ought not to do, or lawfully may do*; only here we add to it this Consideration, that the Action which we are persuaded to be good, or bad, or indifferent, is now done or omitted by us, and we do remember it. In the former Case, Conscience was considered as the Guide of our Actions; in the latter Case it is considered as the Witness of our Actions: But, in both Cases, Conscience is the Judge; and consequently in both Cases the Notion of it is the same, only with this Difference, that in the former it was a Man's Mind, making a Judgment what he ought to do, or not to do; in the latter it is a Man's Mind, reflecting upon what he hath done, or not done, and judging whether he be innocent or culpable in the Matter he reflects upon.

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I do not know how to give a clearer Account of the Nature of Conscience in general, than this I have now given. This, I believe, is the natural Notion that all Men have of it; and there is no Expression in Scripture about it, but what doth confirm this Notion. If, indeed, we put Epithets to Conscience, and talk of a good Conscience, or an evil Conscience; a tender Conscience, or a seared Conscience, or the like; then it includes more, both in Scripture, and in common Language, than I have now mentioned. But to give an Account of those Things, I am not now concerned, as being without the Limits of our present Enquiry.

II. And now we are sufficiently prepared for our second general Point, which is touching the *Rule of Conscience*; if, indeed, after what we have already said, it be not superfluous to insist upon that.

It appears plainly, by what I have represented, that Conscience must always have a *Rule*, which it is to follow, and by which it is to be govern'd: For since Conscience is nothing else but a Man's *Judgment* concerning *Actions*, as good, or bad, or indifferent; 'tis certain, that a Man must have some Measures to proceed by, in order to the framing such a Judgment about Actions; that is to say, there must be something distinct from the Man himself, that makes Actions to be good, or bad, or indifferent;

different; and from which, by applying particular Actions to it, or comparing them with it, a Man may be able to judge, whether they be of the one Sort, or the other. Now this, whatever it be, is that which we call the *Rule of Conscience*; and so much it is its Rule, that *Conscience* can be no farther a safe Guide, than as it follows that Rule.

If now it be asked what this Rule of Conscience is; or what that is which makes a Difference between Actions, as to the moral Goodness or Badness of them; the Answer to it is obvious to every Body, that it can be nothing else but the *Law of GOD*: For nothing can be a *Duty*, but what GOD's Law hath made so; and nothing can be a *Sin*, but what GOD's Law hath forbidden, the very Notion of Sin being, that it is a Transgression of the Law: And lastly, We call a Thing *lawful*, or *indifferent*, upon this very Account, that there is no Law of GOD either commanding or forbidding it; and where there is no Law, there is no Transgression. So that undeniably the great, nay, I say, the only Rule by which Conscience is to be governed, is the *Law of GOD*, considered either as it commands Actions, or forbids them, or as it neither commands them nor forbids them.

But, in order to the giving a more distinct Account of this *Rule of Conscience*, there

there is this needful to be enquired into, *viz.* In what Sense we take, or what we mean by the *Law of God*, when we say, it is the *Rule of Conscience*.

Now to this our Answer is, That by the *Law of God*, we here understand *God's Will*, for the Government of Mens Actions, in what Way soever that Will is declared to them.

Now the Will of *God* is declared to Men two Ways; either by *Nature*, or by *Revelation*; so that the just and adequate Rule of Conscience is made up of two Parts, the *Law of Nature*, and *God's Revealed Law*.

By the *Law of Nature* we mean those Principles of Good and Evil, Just and Unjust, which *God* hath stamped upon the Minds of all Men, in the very Constitution of their Natures. There are some Things eternally Good in themselves; such as, to worship *God*, to honour our Parents, to stand to our Covenants, to live peaceably in the Government, from which we receive Protection; and the contrary to these will be eternally Evil; the Heads of all which Things, thus Good in themselves, are writ so plainly and *legibly* in the Minds of Mankind, that there is no Man, who is come to the Use of his Reason, but must of Necessity be convinced, that to practise these Things will always be his Duty, and not
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to practise them, will always be Evil, and a Sin. Now all these Heads and Principles, put together, is that we call the *Law of Nature*; and this is all the Rule of Conscience that Mankind had, before GOD was pleased to discover his Will by more particular *Revelation*. And this is that Law which the Apostle speaks of, when he saith, *that the Gentiles, who had not the Law of Moses, yet had a Law written in their Hearts*; by their acting according to which, or contrary to which, *their Conscience did bear Witness to them*, and did either *accuse* them, or *excuse* them.

But then, Secondly, to us *Christians*, GOD, to this *Law of Nature*, hath superadded a *Revealed Law*, which is contained in the Books of Holy Scriptures; which Revealed Law yet, is not wholly of a different Kind from the former, nor doth it at all void the Obligation of it, but only thus: GOD hath, in his Revealed Law, declared the Precepts of the Law of Nature more certainly and accurately than before: He hath given greater Force and Strength to them than they had before, by the Sanctions of greater Rewards and Punishments: He hath likewise herein perfected the Law of Nature, and hath Obligated us, in Point of Duty, to more and higher Instances of Virtue than Nature did strictly Oblige us to: And lastly, He hath added some positive Laws for us
to

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to observe, which were not at all contained in the Law of Nature: As for Instance, to believe in *Jesus Christ*, in order to Salvation; to make all our Applications to God, in the Name of that Mediator *Christ Jesus*; to enter into a *Christian Society* by *Baptism*; and to exercise *Communion* with that Society, by partaking of the *Lord's Supper*.

And this is that Law which we *Christians* are obliged to, as well as to the Law of our Natures; and which, as it is a Summary of all the Laws of Nature, so, indeed, is it a Summary of all our Duty: So that if any Man will call it the great, or only Rule of *Christian Conscience*, I shall not much oppose him, provided that this be always remembered, that,

In the Third Place, when we say, That the *Natural* and *Revealed* Law of GOD is the just *Rule*, by which we are to govern our Conscience; or when we say, that the Law of GOD, as revealed and contained in the *Bible*, is, to us *Christians*, the just *Rule*: We are so to understand this Proposition, as to take into it, not only all that is directly and expressly commanded or forbidden by either of those Laws, but also all that by plain Collection of right Reason, in applying Generals to Particulars, or comparing one Thing with another, doth appear to be commanded or forbidden by them.

So

So that by the *Law of Nature*, as it is a Rule of Conscience, we are not only to understand the prime Heads, and most general Dictates of it (which are but a few) but also all the necessary Deductions from those Heads. And by the *Law of Scripture*, as it is the Rule of Conscience, we are not only to understand the express Commands and Prohibitions we meet with there, in the Letter of the Text; but all the Things, likewise, that by unavoidable Consequence do follow from those Commands, or Prohibitions. In a Word, when we are deliberating with our selves, concerning the Goodness or Badness, the Lawfulness or Unlawfulness of this, or the other particular Action; we are not only to look upon the Letter of the Law, but to attend further to what that Law may be supposed by a rational Man to contain in it. And if we be convinced, that the Action we are deliberating about is commanded or forbidden, by direct *Inference*, or by *Parity of Reason*, we ought to look upon it as a Duty, or a Sin, tho' it be not expressly *commanded* or *forbidden* by the Law, in the Letter of it. And if neither by the Letter of the Law, nor by Consequence from it, nor by Parity of Reason, the Action before us appear, either to be commanded or forbidden; in that Case we are to look upon it as an indifferent Action, which we may do, or let

let alone, with a safe Conscience: Or, to express the Thing more properly, we are to look upon it as an Action in which our *Conscience* is not so much concerned as our *Prudence*.

III. Having thus given an Account of the *Rule of Conscience*, that which naturally follows next to be considered, with Reference to our present Design, is, *What Share human Laws have in this Rule of Conscience*: Whether they be a Part of this Rule, and do really bind a Man's Conscience to the Observance of them, or no? Which is our third general Head.

Now, as to this, our Answer is, That tho' the *Laws of God* be the great, and indeed the only Rule of Conscience, yet the *Laws of Men*, generally speaking, do also bind the Conscience, and are a Part of its Rule, in a *secondary* Sense; that is, by Virtue of, and in Subordination to, the *Laws of God*.

I shall briefly explain the Meaning of this in the four following Propositions.

First, There is nothing more certain, than that the *Law of God*, as it is declared both by *Nature and Scripture*, doth command us to obey the *Laws of Men*.

There is no One Dictate of Nature more obvious to us than this, That we are to Obey the Government we live under, in all Honest and Just Things: For
this

this is, indeed, the principal Law and Foundation of all Society. And it would be impossible, either for Kingdoms, or States, for Cities, or Families, to subsist, or at least to maintain themselves in any tolerable Degree of Peace and Happiness, if this be not acknowledged a Duty.

And then, as for the Laws of God in Scripture, there is nothing more plainly declared there, than that it is God's Will, and our Duty, to *obey them that have the Rule over us; and to submit our selves to every Ordinance of Man, for the Lord's Sake, and to be subject, not only for Wrath, but for Conscience Sake.* So that no Man can doubt, that he is really bound in Duty to obey the Laws of Men, that are made by just and sufficient Authority. And consequently no Man can doubt, that human Laws do really bind the Conscience, and are one Part of the Rule, by which it is to be directed and governed.

But then having said this, we add this farther in the second Place, That *human Laws do not bind the Conscience, by any Virtue in themselves, but meerly by Virtue of God's Law, who has commanded, that we should in all Things be subject to our lawful Governors, not only for Wrath, but for Conscience Sake.* Conscience is not properly concerned with any Being in the World, save God alone; it hath no Superior but him: For

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the very Notion of it, as I have often said, is no other than *our Judgment, of what Things we are bound to do by God's Law, and what Things we are forbidden to do by God's Law.*

So that all the Men in the World cannot bind any Man's Conscience, by Virtue of any Power or Authority that is in them: But now God having made it an everlasting Law, both by *Nature* and *Scripture*, that we should obey those who are set over us; whether they be our *Parents*, or our *Masters*, and much more our *Princes*, and the *Sovereign Legislative Power*, under whom we live; by Virtue of this Command of God, and this only, we are for ever bound in Conscience, to govern our Actions by the Commands that they impose upon us; and those Commands of theirs are a Rule (tho' a *consequential* or a *secondary* Rule) by which we are to govern our Conscience, because they are the Instances of our Obedience to the Laws of God.

But then, in the third Place, this is also to be remembered; that *human Laws do no farther bind the Conscience, and are a Rule of it, than as they are agreeable to the Laws of God.* If any Law, or Command of Man do clash with any Law of God; that is, if it be either Evil in itself, or contradictory to the Duty of *Christians*, as laid down in the Scriptures; in that Case, that
Law

Law or Command, by what human Authority soever it was made or given, doth not bind our Conscience, nor is any Rule of our Actions. On the contrary, we are not, at any Rate, to yield Obedience to it; but we are here reduced to the Apostles Case, and must act as they did, that is, we *must obey God rather than Men*, and we sin if we do not. For since God only hath proper and direct Authority over our Conscience, and Human Power, only by Delegation from him; and since God hath not given any Commission to the most Sovereign Princes upon Earth to alter his Laws, or to impose any Thing upon his Subjects, that is inconsistent with them: It follows by necessary Consequence, that no Man can be obliged to obey any Laws of Men, farther than they are agreeable to, and consistent with the Laws of God.

There is yet a fourth Thing necessary to be taken in, for the clearing the Point we are upon, and that is this, That tho' human Laws, generally speaking, may be said to bind the Conscience, and to be a Part of its Rule; yet we do not assert that every *human Law* (though it doth not interfere with any of God's Laws) *doth at all Times, and in all Cases, oblige every Man's Conscience to Active Obedience to it*; so as that he sins against God, if he transgress it. No, it would be a very hard Thing to affirm this; and

I do not know what Man among us, upon these Terms, would be Innocent.

Thus much I believe we may safely lay down as a Truth; That where either the *Matter* of the Law is of such a Nature, that the Publick, or some private Person shall suffer Damage, or Inconvenience by our not observing it: Or, Secondly, Tho' the Law, as to the *Matter* of it, be never so trifling; nay, tho' perhaps, all Things considered, it be an inconvenient Law; yet, if the *Manner* of our not obeying it, be such as gives *Offence* to our Superiors, or to any others; that is, either argues a *Contempt* of Authority, or sets an ill *Example* before our Fellow-subjects: I say, in either of these Cases, the Transgression of a Human Law renders a Man guilty of a *Fault*, as well as obnoxious to the *Penalty* of that Law. But out of these two Cases, I must confess, I do not see how a purely Human Law doth oblige the Conscience; or how the Transgression of it doth make a Man guilty of Sin before God. For it is certain, if we secure these two Points; that is to say, the Good of the Publick, and of private Persons; and withal the Sacredness and Respect which is due to Authority (which is likewise in Order to the Publick Good) we answer all the Ends, for which the Power of making Laws, or laying Commands upon Inferiors, was committed by God to Mankind.

So that though it be true, that Human Laws do oblige the Conscience, yet it is also true, that a great many Cases may, and do happen, in which a Man may act contrary to a purely human Law, and yet not be a Sinner before God. Always supposing (as I said) there be no *Contempt* or *Refractoriness* expressed towards the Governors; nor no *Scandal*, or ill Example given to others by *the Action*. For if there be either of these in the Case, I dare not acquit the Man from being a Transgressor of God's Law, in the Instance wherein he transgresseth the Laws of *Men*.

For this is that which we insist upon; that the Authority of our Governors ought to be held and esteemed very sacred, both because the Laws of God, and the Publick Good require it should be so. And therefore, wherever they do peremptorily lay their Commands upon us, we are bound in Conscience so far to comply, as not to *contest* the *Matter* with them, nor to *seem* to do it. And though their Commands, as to the *Matter* of them, be never so slight; nay, though they should prove really inconvenient, either to our selves, or the Publick; yet, if they *stand* upon them, if they persist in requiring our Obedience to them, we must yield, we must obey; always supposing they be not against God's Laws. For we are at no Hand, either to affront their Authority

our selves, or to encourage others by our Example, to do it. For to do either of these Things, is a greater Evil to the Publick, than our Obedience to an inconvenient *Law* can easily be.

IV. And now it is Time for us to apply what hath been said in General concerning the *Rule of Conscience*, and the *Obligation of human Laws*, to the particular Matter here before us; that is, the Business of *Church Communion*; the *Obligation of Conscience* to which, in such Manner as the *Laws* have appointed, is the fourth general Head we are to consider.

This Point of the *Obligation to Communion with the Church*, as by *Law established*, hath been largely handled by several learned Men of our Church, and particularly it is the Argument of one of these Discourses, which have lately been writ for the Sake of our Dissenters. Thither, therefore, I refer the Reader, for full Satisfaction about this matter, being only just to touch upon it here, as one of the Principles we take for granted, and shall proceed upon in the following Discourse.

And here the Proposition we lay down is this, *That it is every Man's Duty, and consequently every Man is bound in Conscience to join in Communion with that Church which is established by Law in the Place where he lives, so long as that Church is a true, sound Part of the Catholick Church, and there is nothing imposed*

posed or required, as a Condition of communicating with it, that is repugnant to the Laws of God, or the Appointments of Jesus Christ.

This Proposition is evident, not only because it necessarily follows from the foregoing Principle; which was, that every Man is bound in Conscience to obey the Laws of Men, that are not contrary to the Laws of God; and therefore, consequently, a Man is bound to obey in *Ecclesiastical* Matters, as well as *Civil* (unless it can be shewed, that *Christ* hath forbid all human Authority, whether *Ecclesiastical* or *Civil*, to make any Laws or Orders about Religion; which I believe never was or can be shewed) but it is evident, upon another Account, which I desire may be considered. We are all really bound by the Laws of *Jesus Christ*, and the Nature of his Religion, to preserve, as much as in us lies, the *Unity* of the *Church*: Which *Unity* doth consist, not only in professing the same *Faith*, but joining together with our Brethren under common *Governors*, in the same religious *Communion* of Worship and Sacraments. And therefore, whoever breaks this *Unity* of the Church, by withdrawing his Obedience from those Church *Governors*, which God hath set over him in the Place where he lives; and separating from the established religious Assemblies of *Christians* under those *Governors*, doth really transgress the Laws of *Jesus Christ*, and is

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guilty of that Sin of *Schism*, which is so very much cautioned against, and so highly condemned in the Scriptures of the New Testament: Unless, in the mean Time, it doth appear to the Man, who thus withdraws, and separates, that there is something required of him in those Assemblies, and by those Governors, and that as a Term and Condition of holding Communion with them, which he cannot submit to without Sin.

And this Point I do heartily wish was well considered by our Dissenting Brethren. They do seem often to look upon this Business of coming to Church, and joining with us in Prayers and Sacraments, no otherwise to bind their Conscience, than other purely human Laws. They think they owe no Obedience to the Laws in these Matters, different from that which they yield to any common Act of Parliament. And therefore no Wonder they often make so slight a Business of them.

But this is a great Mistake: there is much more in these Things than this comes to. The withdrawing our Communion from the Church, carries a far greater Guilt in it, than the violating any Law that is purely human. For though we do readily grant, that all the Circumstances of Publick Worship enjoined in the Church; as for Instance, the Times, the Gestures, the Forms of Prayer, the Methods of reading the Scripture, and administering the Sacraments; as also, the Habits of
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the Ministers that are to officiate, be all of *human* Institution, and may be altered and varied at the Discretion of our Governors; yet the Publick Worship itself, under publick lawful Governors, is of divine Appointment, and no Man can renounce it, without sinning against *Jesus Christ*, as well as offending against the *Ecclesiastical* Laws.

A *Human* Law, grounded upon a *Divine*, or, to speak more properly, a *Divine* Law, modified or clothed with several Circumstances of Man's Appointment, doth create another Kind of Obligation upon every Subject, than a Law that is purely *human*; that is to say, a Law, the Matter of which is neither Good nor Evil in itself, but perfectly indifferent. In the former Case, we must yield Obedience to the Law, as to the Law of God, however it comes clothed with Circumstances of Man's Appointment: In the other Case, we only yield Obedience, as to the Command of Man; and for no other Reason, than that God, in general, hath obliged us to obey our Superiors.

To make this a little plainer, let us, for Instance, take the Business of paying *Tribute* and *Custom* in this Nation, in which Case there is a Complication of a divine Law with a human, as it is in the Case we are now upon. That every Subject should pay *Tribute, to whom Tribute is due; Custom, to whom Custom is due;* is a Law
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of God, as being a Branch both of Natural and Christian Justice: But out of what Goods we should pay Tribute or Custom, or what Proportion of those Goods should be paid, this is not defined, either by the Law of Nature, or the Law of the Gospel, but is left to the Determination of the Municipal Laws of every Kingdom. But now, because human Authority doth interpose in this Affair, and settles what every Man is to pay to the King, and out of what Commodities; doth it therefore follow, that if a Man can, by Fraud or Concealment, detain the King's Right from him, that he incurs no other Guilt for this, but only the transgressing of an Act of Parliament, and the being obnoxious to the Penalties, in Case he be detected? No, certainly; for all that the Customs in that Manner and Form be settled upon the King by human Law only, yet the Matter of that Law being a Point of natural Justice between Man and Man, the Man that is thus guilty, ought to look upon himself as an Offender against the Divine Law, as an unjust Person before God. And his Willingness to submit to the Forfeiture of his Goods, will not render him less unjust, or more excusable.

The Case is much the same, as to the Matter we have now before us. It is not a meer human Law, or Act of Parliament, that obligeth us to keep the Unity of the Church;

Church; to bring our Children to be made *Christians* by Baptism; to meet together at solemn Times, for the Profession of our Faith, for the worshiping God, for the commemorating the Death of our Saviour in the Sacrament of his Supper. All this is tied upon us by the Laws of *Christ*. These Things are as much required of us by God, as *Christians*, as it is required that we should pay the King, and every Man, what is due to them, if we would not be dishonest and unjust. It is true that the particular Forms, and Modes, and Circumstances of doing these Things, are not commanded, nor prescribed by the Laws of *Christ*, in this Instance of Church Communion, no more than they are prescribed by the Laws of God, in the other Instance I gave: But they are left entirely to the Prudence and Discretion of the Governors that God hath set over us in Ecclesiastical Matters, just as they are in the other. But, in the mean Time these Things, thus clothed by human Authority, as to their *Circumstances*; yet being, for the *Matter* of them, bound upon us by *Christ* himself, we can no more deny our Obedience to the publick Laws about them, than we can in the other Instance I have named. And that Man may as well, for Instance, purge himself from the Imputation of *Knavery* before God, that will contrive a Way of his own, for the paying his

his just Debts, contrary to what the Law of the Land hath declared to be just and honest; as any Man can acquit himself from the Sin of Schism before God, that will chuse a Way of his own for the Publick Worship, different from, and in Opposition to what the Laws of the Church have prescribed; always supposing, that the Worship established be commanded by just Authority, and there be nothing required in it, as a Condition of Communion, that is against the Laws of *Jesus Christ*.

The Sum of all this is, that it is every Man's Duty, by the Laws of *Christ*, as well as the Laws of Man, to worship God in the Way of the Church, so long as there is nothing required in that Worship, that can justly offend the Conscience of a wise and good *Christian*. And therefore, there is more in departing from the Communion of the Church, when we can lawfully hold it, than meerly the Violation of a *Statute*, or a *human Law*; for we cannot do it without breaking the Law of God. Nay, so much is it against the Law of God to do this, that I think no Authority upon Earth can warrant it. So that even if there was a Law made, which should ordain, that wilful, causeless Separation from the Established Church, should be allowed and tolerated, and no Man should be called to an Account for it; yet, nevertheless, such a Separation would

would still be a *Schism*, would still be a Sin against God; for no human Law can make that lawful, which God's Law hath forbid.

There now only remains our last general Head about Conscience to be spoken to, and then we have done with our *Preliminary Points*: And that is, concerning the *Authority of Conscience*, or *how far a Man is obliged to follow or be guided by his Conscience in his Actions*.

When we speak of the Obligation of Conscience, or of being bound in Conscience to do or not to do an Action; it sufficiently appears from what hath been said, that we can mean no more by these Phrases than this, that we are convinced in our Judgment that it is our Duty to do this or the other Action; because we believe that God hath commanded it. Or we are persuaded in our Judgment, that we ought to forbear this or the other Action; because we believe that God hath forbidden it.

This now being that which we mean by the *Obligation of Conscience*; here we come to enquire, how far this Persuasion or Judgment of ours concerning what is our Duty, and what is sinful, hath Authority over us; how far it doth oblige us to act or not act, according to it.

Now in order to the resolving of this, we must take Notice, that our Judgment concerning

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cerning what God hath commanded, or forbidden, or left indifferent, is either true or false. We either make a right Judgment of our Duty, or we make a wrong one. In the former Case, we call our *Judgment* a *right Conscience*; in the latter we call it an *erroneous Conscience*. As for those Cases where we doubt and hesitate, and know not well how to make any Judgment at all (which is that we call a *doubting Conscience*; but indeed, is properly no Conscience, unless by Accident) we have nothing here to do with them, but shall reserve them to another Place. Here we do suppose, that we do make a Judgment of the Thing; that is, we are persuaded in our Minds concerning the Goodness or Badness of this, or the other Action: And that which we are to enquire into is, how far that Judgment binds us to act according to it.

Now if our Conscience be a *right Conscience*; that is, if we have truly informed our Judgment according to the Rule of God's Law; it is beyond all Question, and acknowledged by all the World, that we are in that Case perpetually bound to act according to our Judgment. It is for ever our Duty so to do; and there can no Blame, no Guilt fall upon us, for so doing, let the Consequence of our Acting, or not Acting, be what it will. So that as to a *right Conscience*,

science, or a well informed Judgment, there is no Dispute among any Sort of Men.

But the great Thing to be enquired into is, what Obligation a Man is under to act according to his Judgment, supposing it be false, supposing he hath not rightly informed his Conscience, but hath taken up false Measures of what God hath commanded or forbidden.

Now for the Resolution of this, I lay down these three Propositions, which I think will take in all that is needful, for the giving Satisfaction to every one, concerning this Point.

First, *Where a Man is mistaken in his Judgment, even in that Case it is always a Sin to act against it.* Be our Conscience never so ill instructed, as to what is *Good*, or *Evil*, though we should take that for a *Duty* which is really a *Sin*; and on the contrary, that for *Sin* which is really a *Duty*; yet so long as we are thus persuaded, it will be highly criminal in us, to act in Contradiction to this Persuasion; and the Reason of this is evident, because, by so doing, we wilfully act against the best Light, which at present we have, for the Direction of our Actions; and consequently our *Will* is as faulty, and as wicked, in consenting to such Actions, as if we had had truer Notions of Things.

We are to remember, that the *Rule* of our Duty, whatever it be itself, cannot touch or affect our Actions, but by the Mediation of
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our *Conscience*; that is, no farther than as it is apprehended by us, or as we do understand and remember it. So that when all is done, the *immediate Guide* of our Actions can be nothing but our *Conscience*; our Judgment and Persuasion concerning the Goodness, or Badness, or Indifference of Things.

It is true, in all these Instances where we are mistaken, our *Conscience* proves but a very bad and unsafe *Guide*; because it hath itself lost its Way, in not following its *Rule* as it should have done: But, however, our *Guide* still it is, and we have no other Guide of our Actions but that. And if we may lawfully refuse to be guided by it in one Instance, we may with as much reason reject its Guidance in all.

What is the Notion that any of us hath of a wilful Sin, or a Sin against Knowledge, but this? That we have done otherwise than we were convinced to be our Duty, at the same Time that we did so. And what other Measures have we of any Man's *Sincerity* or *Hypocrisy*; but only this? That he acts according to the best of his Judgment, or that he doth not act according to what he pretends to believe.

We do not indeed say, that every one is a *good* Man, that acts according to his Judgment; or that he is to be commended for all Actions that are done in Pursuance of his Persuasion: No, we measure
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sure *Virtue* and *Vice* by the *Rule*, according to which a Man ought to act, as well as by the Man's *Intention* in acting. But however, we all agree, that that Man is a *Knave*, that in any Instance acts contrary to that which he took to be his *Duty*. And in passing this Sentence we have no regard to this, Whether the Man was right, or mistaken in his Judgment; for, be his Judgment right or wrong, true or false, 'tis all one as to his *Honesty* in acting or not acting according to it.

He that hath a false Persuasion of Things, so long as that Persuasion continues, is often as well satisfied that he is in the Right, as if his Persuasion was true; that is, he is oftentimes as confident when he is in an Error, as when he is in the Right: And therefore we cannot but conclude, that he who, being under a Mistake, will be tempted to act contrary to his Judgment, would certainly upon the same Temptation act contrary to it, was his Judgment, never so well informed: And therefore, his *Will* being as bad in the one Case as in the other, he is equally a Sinner as to the *Wilfulness* of the Crime, tho, indeed, in other respects there will be a great Difference in the Cases.

This, I believe, is the Sense of all Men in this Matter. If a Man, for Instance, should of a *Jew* become a *Christian*, while yet in his Heart he believeth that the *Messiah* is not yet come, and that our Lord *Je-*

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sus was an Impostor : Or if a *Papist* should, to serve some private Ends, renounce the Communion of the *Roman Church*, and join with ours, while yet he is persuaded that the *Roman Church* is the *only Catholick Church*, and that our Reformed Churches are *Heretical* or *Schismatical*: Tho' now there is none of us will deny that the Men in both these Cases have made a good Change, as having changed a *false Religion* for a *true* one; yet, for all that, I dare say, we should all agree, thay were both of them great *Villains* and *Hypocrites*, for making that change, because they made it not upon honest Principles, and in pursuance of their Judgment, but in direct Contradiction to both. Nay I dare say, we should all of us think better of an ignorant well-meaning *Protestant*, that being seduced by the Persuasions and Artifices of a cunning *Popish Factor*, did really out of *Conscience* abandon our Communion, and go over to the *Romanists*, as thinking theirs to be the safest; I say, we should all of us entertain a more favourable Opinion of such a Man in such a Case, tho' really here the Change is made from a true Religion to a false one, than we should of either of the other Men I have before named. All this put together, is abundantly sufficient to shew, that no Man can in any Case Act against his Judgment

ment or Persuasion, but he is guilty of Sin in so doing.

But then our second Proposition is this, *The Mistake of a Man's Judgment may be of such a Nature, that as it will be a Sin to act against his Judgment, so it will likewise be a Sin to act according to it.*

For, what Authority soever a Man's Conscience has over him, it can never bear him out, if he do an evil Thing in Compliance with it. My Judgment is (as we have said) the Guide of my Actions; but it may thro' my Negligence be so far misguided itself, as that, if I follow it, it will lead me into the most horrid Crimes in the World: And will it be a sufficient Excuse or Justification of my Action in such a Case, to say, that, indeed, herein I did but act according to my Persuasion? No verily; I may as certainly be damned, without Repentance, for acting according to my Judgment in some Cases, where it is mistaken, as I shall be for acting contrary to it in other Cases, where it is rightly inform'd.

And the Reason of this is very plain. It is not my Judgment or Persuasion that makes *Good* or *Evil*, *Right* or *Wrong*, *Justice* or *Injustice*, *Virtue* or *Vice*; but it is the Nature of Things themselves; and the Law of GOD (and of Men under that) commanding or forbidding Things, that makes them so. If the *Moral* Goodness

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or Badness of Actions was to be measured by Mens Opinions and Persuasions; then Good and Evil, Duty and Sin, would be the most various uncertain Things in the World. They would change their Natures as often as Men change their Opinions; and that which to-day is a Virtue, to-morrow would be a Crime; and that which in one Man would be a heroically-good Action, would in another Man be a prodigious Piece of Villany; tho' yet there was no Difference in the Action itself, or in the Circumstances of the Man that did it, save only the Difference of Opinion.

But such Consequences as these are intolerable; nor indeed do Men either talk or think after this manner. Every Man, when he speaks of Good or Evil, Lawful or Unlawful, means some certain fixed Thing, which it is not in his Power to alter the Nature and Property of. That Action is good, and a Duty, which is either so in itself, or made so by some positive Law of GOD; and that Action is evil, and a Sin, that is forbid by GOD, in either of these Ways: So that unless it was in our Power to change the Nature of Things, or to alter the Laws of GOD; it will unavoidably follow, that we shall be for ever obliged to do some Actions, and to forbear others, whatever our Judgment concerning them is: And consequently we may be guilty of Sin, if in these Instances we act contrary to this Obligation;

tion; tho' at the same Time it should happen; that we are firmly persuaded that we ought so to do.

And thus is our Proposition fully proved: But then, for the farther clearing of it, I desire it may be taken notice of, that we do not thus lay it down, that every Mistake of Judgment about Good or Evil doth involve a Man in Sin, if he act according to that Mistake; but only thus, the Mistake of a Man's Judgment *may be* of such a Nature, that as it will be a Sin in him to act against it, so it will likewise be Sin to act according to it: It is not every Error in Morals that brings a Man under the Necessity of Sinning, if he pursues it in his Actions. A Man's Conscience may mistake its Rule in a hundred Instances, and yet he may safely enough act according to it; and the Reason is, because a Man may entertain a great many Mistakes, and false Notions of his Duty, and act according to them too; and yet, in such Actions, he shall not transgress any Law of God.

Now this that I say holds chiefly in these two Instances: For Example, in the first Place, if a Man believe a Thing to be commanded by God, which yet indeed is not; but neither is it forbidden: As if a Man should think himself obliged to retire himself from his Business *seven Times*, or *three Times a Day* for the Purpose of Devotion;

or to give half of his yearly Income to pious and charitable Uses, if he can do it without Prejudice to his Family. Now, in this Case, he is certainly mistaken in his Duty; for the Law of GOD hath not bound him up to such Measures in either of these Instances: But yet, because GOD hath not, on the other hand, laid any Commands upon him to the contrary, 'tis certain he may, in both these Instances, act according to this Mistake, without any Guilt in the World: Nay, so long as that Mistake continues, he is bound to act accordingly.

Again, in the second Place, if a Man believe a Thing to be forbidden by GOD's Law, which yet is not; but neither is it commanded: As for Instance; if a Man think that he ought, by Virtue of a Divine Command, to abstain from all Meats that are strangled, or have Blood in them; or if he believe it unlawful to play at Cards or Dice; or that it is forbidden by GOD's Word to let out Money at Interest: Why, in all these Cases he may follow his Opinion, tho' it be a false one, without Sin: Nay, he is bound to follow it, because it is the Dictate of his Conscience, however his Conscience be mistaken. And the Reason is plain, because, tho' he be mistaken in his Judgment about these Matters, yet, since GOD hath not, by any Law, forbid these Things, there is no Transgression follows upon acting according to such a mistake.

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But then in other Cases where a Man's Mistake happens to be of such a Nature, as that he cannot act according to his Conscience, but he transgresseth some Law of GOD, by which Conscience ought to be govern'd: As for Instance; when a Man looks upon that as a lawful Action, or as a Duty, which God hath forbidden; or looks upon that as a Sin, or at least an indifferent Action, which God hath commanded; here it is that the Mistake becomes dangerous. And in such Cases the Man is brought into that sad *Dilemma* we have been representing, *viz.* That if he acts according to his Persuasion, he transgresseth God's Law, and so is a Sinner upon that Account: If he acts against his Persuasion, then he is self-condemned, and very guilty before God upon that account.

Well, but is there no avoiding of this? Must it be laid down as a constant universal Truth, that in all Cases where a Man's Judgment happens to be contrary to the Rule of his Duty, commanding or forbidding an Action, he must of Necessity sin, whether he act, or not act according to that Judgment? If, indeed, he act against his Conscience, it is readily granted he sins; but it seems very hard that he should be under a Necessity of sinning when he acts according to it; especially when he is perfectly ignorant of, or mistaken in the Law, against which he offends.

This is indeed the great Difficulty that occurs in this Matter; and for the untying it, I lay down this third general Proposition, *viz.* That *the great Thing to be attended to in this Case, of a Man's following a mistaken Judgment, is the Culpableness or Inculpableness, the Faultiness or Innocence of the Mistake upon which he acts; for according as this is, so will his Guilt in acting according to it be either greater, or less, or none at all.*

We do not say, that a Man is always guilty of a Sin before God, when, upon a Misinformation of Judgment, he omits that which God's Law hath commanded; or doth that which God's Law hath forbidden: No, tho' these Omissions or Actions may be said to be Sins in themselves; that is, as to the *Matter* of them, as being Transgressions of God's Law; yet before we affirm that they will be imputed to a Man as such, that is, prove *formally* Sins to him, we first consider the Nature of the Action, and the Circumstances of the Man. If we find, upon Examination, that the Instance wherein God's Law is transgress'd, is such an Instance, as even an honest-minded Man may well be supposed to mistake in: And if we find likewise, that the Man had not sufficient Means for the informing himself aright as to this Matter; and that he hath done all that he could do, in his Circumstances, to understand his Duty; If in
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such a Case as this he be mistaken in his Duty, and act upon that Mistake, yet we do not say, that the Man is properly guilty of any Sin in that Action; however that Action is indeed contrary to the Law of God. On the contrary, we believe him to be innocent as to this Matter; nor will God ever call him to an Account for what he hath done or omitted in these Circumstances.

And the Reasons and Grounds upon which we affirm this, are plain and evident at the first Hearing. No Man can be obliged to do more than what is in his Power to do; and whatever a Man is not obliged to do, 'tis no Sin in him if he do it not: So that if a Man do all that one in his Circumstances can, or should do, for the right understanding of his Duty; if he happens to be mistaken, that Mistake cannot be imputed to him as a Sin, because he was not obliged to understand better: And if his Mistake be no Sin, it is certain, to act according to that Mistake, can be no Sin neither.

So that the whole Point of sinning, or not sinning, in following an *erroneous Conscience*, lies here: Whether the Man that is thus mispersuaded is to be blamed, or not blamed, for his Misperasuasion. If the Error he hath taken up, do not proceed from his own Fault and Negligence, but was the pure unavoidable Effects of the Circumstances in which he is placed (which Circumstances,

stances, we suppose, he contributed nothing to, but he was put into them by the Disposition of divine Providence) then, of what Nature soever the Error be, he doth not contract any Guilt by any Action which he doth in pursuance of that Error: But if it was in his Power to rectify that Error; if he had Means and Opportunities to inform his Conscience better; and the Nature of the Action was such, that it was his Duty so to do, so that he must be accounted guilty of a gross and criminal Neglect in not doing it; in this Case the Man is a Transgressor, and accountable unto GOD, as such, for all the Actions that he doth or omits, contrary to GOD's Law, while he acts under that mistake, or in Pursuance of it. And accordingly, as this Neglect or Carelessness is greater or less, so is the Sinfulness of the Action, which he doth in pursuance of it, greater or less likewise.

And this is a plain Account of this matter. So that we see there is no fatal unavoidable Necessity laid upon any Man to commit a Sin, by acting according to his Conscience: But if at any Time he be brought under those sad Circumstances, he brings that Necessity upon himself. GOD never put any Man into such a Condition, but that he might do that Duty which was required of him, and be able to give a good Account of his Actions. But here is the Thing

Thing: Men, by their Vice and Wickedness, by neglecting the Means of Instruction that are afforded them, and not using their Reason and Understanding as they should do, may suffer themselves to be brought under the Bondage of such false and evil Principles, that they shall, so long as they hold those Principles, fall into Sin, whether they act according to their Conscience, or act against it.

I have done with the general Points concerning *Conscience*, which I thought needful to be premised, as the Grounds and Principles of our following Discourse; I now come to that which I at first proposed, and for the Sake of which all this is intended; that is, to speak to the Case of those that *separate from the Communion of the Church of England, upon this Pretence; That it is against their Conscience to join with us in it.*

Now all that I conceive needful to be done, in order to a full Discussion of this Case, and giving Satisfaction about it, are these two Things:

First, *To separate the Pretensions of Conscience that are truly and justly made in this Matter, from the false ones:* Or, to shew who those are that can rightly plead Conscience for their Nonconformity, and who those are that cannot.

Secondly, *To enquire how far this Plea of Conscience, when it is truly made, will*
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justify any Dissenter that continues in Separation from the Church, as establish'd among us; and what is to be done by such a Person, in order to his acting with a safe and good Conscience in this Affair.

Our first Enquiry is, What is required in order to any Man's truly pleading Conscience for his refusing to join in Communion with the Established Church? or, who those Persons are, that can with Justice make that Plea for themselves?

I think it very convenient to begin my Disquisition here, because, by removing all the false Pretences to Conscience, the Controversy will be brought into a much less Compass, and the Difficulties that arise will be more easily untied. The Truth is, if the Thing be examined, I believe it will be found, that the Pretence to Conscience, in the Matter we are talking of, is, as in many other Cases, extended much farther than it ought to be. My meaning is, that of all those who think fit to withdraw from our Communion, and to live in Disobedience to the known Laws of the Church, and pretend Conscience for so doing, in a great many of them 'tis not Conscience, but some other Thing mistaken for Conscience, which is the Principle they act upon. So that if the true Plea of Conscience be separated from those counterfeit ones, which usually usurp that Name, we shall not find either the
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Persons to be so many that refuse Communion with us upon the account of Conscience, truly so called; nor the Cases to be so many, in which they do refuse it upon that Account.

Now, in order to the making such a Separation or Distinction between Conscience *truly* so called, and the several *Pretences* to it, in this Business of not conforming to the Established Worship, I lay down this general Proposition; That if the Principles I have laid down about Conscience be admitted, then it is certainly true, that no Man among us can justly plead Conscience for his Separation from the Church of *England*; or can say, that it is against his Conscience to join in Communion with it, but only such a one as is persuaded in his own Mind, that he cannot communicate with us without sinning against G O D in so doing.

For since, as we have said, Conscience is nothing else but a Man's Judgment concerning Actions, whether they be Duties or Sins, or indifferent: And since the Law of G O D commanding or forbidding Actions, or neither commanding them, nor forbidding them, is the only Rule by which a Man can judge what Actions are Duties, and what are Sins, and what are indifferent; it plainly follows, that as a Man cannot *be bound in Conscience* to do any Action, which it doth not appear to him that God's Law hath

hath some Way or other commanded, and made a Duty; so neither can it *go against a Man's Conscience*, to do any Action, which he is not convinced that GOD's Law hath some Way or other forbidden, and so made a Sin. And therefore, in our present Case, that Man only can justly plead Conscience for his Nonconformity, that can truly say, he is persuaded in his Judgment, that Conformity is forbidden by some Law of GOD: Or, which is the same Thing, no Man can say, it is against his Conscience to join in our Communion, but only such a one as really believes he shall sin against some Law of GOD, if he do join with us.

If against this it be excepted, that it is very possible for a Man to be well satisfied that there is nothing directly sinful in our Worship; but yet, for all that, it may be against his Conscience to join with us in it: As for Instance, in the Case where a Man takes it really to be his Duty to hold constant Communion with some other Congregation, where he believes he can be more edified, or to which he is related by some Church-covenant: To this I answer, That in this Case, I grant, Conscience is rightly pleaded for Separation (tho' how justifiably I do not now examine) but then, I say, this Plea proceeds upon the same Grounds I just now laid down: For if the Man (as is supposed in the Case) be convinced, that it
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is his Duty by GOD's Law (as there is no other Measure of Duty) to hold Communion with others, and not with us; then he must, at the same Time, be convinced, that he cannot, without Transgression of GOD's Law (that is, without Sin) join with us: And that is the same Account which we give, of its being against any Man's Conscience to hold Communion with us.

Farther; if it be urged against our Proposition, that not only in the Case where a Man is persuaded of the Unlawfulness of our Communion, but also in the Case where he only doubts of the Lawfulness of it, a Man may justly plead Conscience for his Nonconformity, so long as those Doubts remain: And therefore it is not truly said of us, that in order to the pleading Conscience for Nonconformity, one must be persuaded in his own Mind, that Conformity is forbidden by some Law of GOD: I answer, That if the Man who thus doubts of the Lawfulness of Conformity, hath really entertained this Principle, that it is a Sin to do any Thing with a doubting Conscience; I grant, that it must go against his Conscience to conform, so long as he doubts. But then, this is but the same Thing we are contending for; for therefore it goes against his Conscience to communicate with us, doubting as he doth, because he believes he shall sin against GOD if he should. But if the Man we
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are speaking of, do not think it a Breach of God's Law, to act with a doubting Conscience; then I do not see how it can, in the least, go against his Conscience to communicate with us upon that Pretence. So that notwithstanding these two Exceptions, which are all I can think of, 'twill still remain true, that no Man can justly plead Conscience for his Separation from the Church, but he that is perswaded that he cannot join with it without sinning against God.

Now, if this Proposition be true, as certainly it is, then how many Mens Pretences to Conscience for their separating from us are hereby cut off. And indeed, how few (in Comparison of the multitude of Dissenters among us) will be left, that can be able with Truth to say, that it is against their Conscience to communicate with us in our Prayers, and in our Sacraments.

In the first Place, it is evident, That all those who separate from us upon account of any *private Grudge* or *Pique*, because they have been disobliged, or have received some Disappointment in the Way of our Church, or by the Men that are Favourers of it; and therefore, out of a Pet, will join themselves to another Communion: All those that think they can serve their own Turns more effectually by being of another Way; as for Instance, they can thereby better *please a Relation*, from whom they have Expectances; they can bet-
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ter advance their Trade, or increase their Fortunes; they can better *procure a Reputation*, or *regain* one that is *sunk*: In a Word, all those that to serve any Ends of *Pride*, or *Interest*, or *Passion*, or out of any other Worldly Consideration, do refuse us their Company in the Worship of God; I say, all such are certainly excluded from pleading Conscience for their Separation.

In the Second Place all those Lay People, who refuse our Communion, upon Account that the *Pastors* and *Teachers*, whom they most Love and Reverence, are not permitted to Exercise their Function among us; whose Pretence it is, that if these good Men were allowed to teach in our Churches, they would come to our Congregations; but so long as that is refused, they will hear them where they can: I say, all these are likewise excluded from pleading Conscience for their Separation. For, however it may really and truly be against the Conscience of their *Ministers* to conform (there being other Things required of them than of ordinary People) yet it is not against their Conscience so to do; for they know no Ill in Conformity, but only that so many good Men are silenced.

In the Third Place, all those that refuse our Communion, upon a *meer Dislike* of several Things in our Church Offices: They do not, for Instance, like a *Form of Prayer* in General, and they have several Things

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to object against our *Form* in Particular; they do not like our *Ceremonies*, they do not like the *Surplice*, or the *Cross* in Baptism; and sundry other Things they find fault with; not that they have any thing to say against the Lawfulness of these Things, but only they have an Aversion to them: All these Men, likewise, are cut off from pleading Conscience for their Separation: for they do not pretend that it is unlawful, or a Sin against God, to join with us in our Service (which is the only Thing wherein their Conscience can be concerned) but only they are not *pleased* with many Things in our Service, as fancying them not to be so decent, or convenient, or not to be so prudently ordered as they would have them. But what of all this? admit the Things to be so as they fancy them; yet still, so long as they do not think there is any Sin in them, it cannot go against their Conscience to join with any Assembly, in which they are practised: Because Conscience, as we have often said, is not touched, is not affected, where no Law of God is transgressed.

In the Fourth Place, all those that are kept from our Communion, purely upon the Account of *Education*, or Acquaintance with Persons that are of another Persuasion: Those that have nothing to say against our Worship, but only that they were bred in another Way; or those that would join with

with us in it, but that they know a great many Religious, Godly Persons, that do condemn it, and therefore they dare not come at us: These, now, may be very well-meaning Men, but yet they cannot reasonably plead Conscience, upon this Account, for their Separation. For it is not a Man's Education, or the Example or Opinion of other Men, that makes any Action to be a Duty, or a Sin, but the Law of God commanding or forbidding that Action. And therefore, before I can say that this, or the other Action is against my Conscience, I must believe that God's Law hath, either in general, or in particular; either directly, or by Consequence, made that Action unlawful. I grant, the Opinions of other Men, especially those that are Learned and Pious, are always to be listened to in doubtful Cases. But then, no Man's Opinion can be the Rule of my Conscience; nor am I at all concerned in Conscience to follow it, any farther than I am convinced that it declares God's Law to me. And therefore, sure in this Case of Church Communion, I can be but very little concerned to follow any Man's Opinion; when, both there are so many Persons, and those as Learned and as Pious as any others, that are of another Opinion; and when also the Publick Law, which has much more Authority than any private Opinion, hath determined what I am to do in the Case. So that it is great

Weakness and Silliness, and not Conscience, that prevails with these men I am speaking of, to live in Disobedience to the Laws. If, indeed, they be really persuaded in their own Minds, that our Way of worshipping God, is in any Part or Instance of it unlawful or forbidden (let that Persuasion be upon what Grounds it will) then they may truly say it is against their Conscience to join with us; but, if they be not convinced of this, I do not see how the Example, or the Advice of their Friends and Acquaintance, can in the least give them a Title to plead Conscience for their refusing our Communion.

Fifthly, Those that withdraw from the Church upon this Account, that our Governors, in their Laws and Prescriptions about God's Worship, have not rightly used the Power which they are intrusted with, but have exceeded their Bounds; have made, perhaps, too great Encroachments upon *Christian Liberty*; or laid more Stress than was meet, upon *indifferent Things*: These, likewise, are excluded by the former Rule, from pleading Conscience for their Separation. For admit the Lawgivers have been to blame in the Exercise of their Power in these Matters (which yet is sooner said than proved) and have really done more than they can answer to God for; yet, what is this to them? The Conscience of the Governors is indeed deeply concerned

concerned about these Things; and they must give an Account to God for the Abuse of their Authority, if there be any; but how this doth concern the Conscience of the Subject, is not easily understood; so long as what is commanded or enjoined, doth not appear to interfere with any Law of God. But having said this, I fear there is too much Reason to add; that those who so much stand up for *Christian Liberty*, and would be thought the great Patrons of it; do, by their endless Scruples about indifferent Things, and refusing to obey Authority in such Matters, in all Appearance take the most effectual Course to destroy all *Christian Liberty*, in the true Notion of it; and to bring in a Religion, that shall consist of *Touch not, Taste not, Handle not*, and such other uncommanded Things.

Sixthly and Lastly (to name no more Instances) all those that can communicate *occasionally* with us in our Prayers and Sacraments: As for Instance, those that when they have a Turn to be served; when there is an Office, or some such Thing in the Case, can come to Church, and receive the Communion, but at other Times they do not afford us their Presence: These are also excluded from pretending to Conscience, for their not *constantly* joining in Communion with us. For if, indeed, they did believe it was a Sin in them to join with us in our

Prayers and Sacraments, with what Conscience dare they do it all? They ought not for any worldly Good, to venture upon such an Action as they do believe to be forbidden by GOD's Law: But if they do not believe, that to join in our Communion is a sinful Thing (as, I dare say, none of these Persons do) then I will be bold to make the Inference, that it cannot be more against their Conscience to do it *Thrice*, than to do it *Once*; and to do it *constantly*, than to do it *Thrice*.

But let us leave the false Pretenders to Conscience, and come to the Case of those, who can justly plead Conscience for their Separation; or that can truly say, it is against their Conscience to join in our Communion.

Of this Sort are all such, and none but such, as do really believe that our Communion is unlawful, or that they cannot communicate with us without Sin, as I have before proved.

As for those that only doubt of the Lawfulness of our Communion, but are not persuaded that it is unlawful; I do not here consider them, because they cannot say, that it is *against their Conscience* to Communicate with, us any more than they can say that they are bound in *Conscience* to Communicate with us; for they are uncertain as to both these Things, and are not determined either Way. But, however, be-
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cause these Men may justly plead Conscience upon this Account; that they think it is a Sin to join with us, so long as they doubt of the Lawfulness of our Communion; I shall consider their Case afterwards, in a particular Discourse upon that Argument.

Those that I am now concerned with, are such as do believe, or are persuaded, that there is something in our Worship, which they cannot comply with, without sinning against God.

And my Business is to examine, *Whether such a Belief, or Persuasion of the Unlawfulness of our Communion, will justify any Man's Separation from us? Or how far it will do it? And what is to be done by such Persons, in order either to their Communicating or not Communicating with us, with a safe Conscience?* This is our Second Point, and I apply myself to it.

There are a great many among us, that would with all their Hearts (as they say) obey the Laws of the Church, and join in our Worship and Sacraments; but they are really persuaded that they cannot do it without Sin: For there are some Things required of them, as Conditions of Communicating with us, which are forbidden by the Law of God.

As for Instance, It is against the Commands of *Christ*, to appoint, or to use any Thing in the Worship of God, which God

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himself hath not appointed. For this is to add to the Word of God, and to *Teach for Doctrines*, the *Commandments* and *Traditions* of Men.

It is against the Commands of *Jesus Christ* to *stint the Spirit* in Prayer, which all those that use a Form of Prayer, must necessarily do.

It is against the Commands of *Jesus Christ* to use any *Significant Ceremony* in Religion: As for Instance, the *Cross* in Baptism; for that is to make new Sacraments.

It is against the Commands of *Jesus Christ* to *Kneel at the Lord's Supper*; for that is directly to contradict our Saviour's Example in his Institution of that Sacrament, and savours, besides, of *Popish Idolatry*.

Since, therefore, there are these sinful Things in our Worship; and those too, imposed as Terms of Communion; how can we blame them, if they withdraw themselves from us? Would we have them join with us in these Practices, which they verily believe to be Sins? Where then was their Conscience? They might, perhaps, by this Means, shew how much they were *the Servants of Men*: But what would become of their Fidelity to *Jesus Christ*?

What now shall we say to this? They themselves are so well satisfied with their own Doings in these Matters, that they do not think they are in the least to be
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blamed for refusing us their Communion, so long as Things stand thus with them. They are sure they herein follow their own Conscience, and therefore they cannot doubt but they are in a safe Condition, and may justify their Proceedings to God, and to all the World, let us say what we please.

This is the Case. Now in answer to it, we must grant them these two Things.

First of all, that if indeed they be right in their Judgment, and those Things which they except against in our Communion, be really unlawful, and forbidden by *Jesus Christ*, then they are not at all to be blamed for their not Communicating with us. For in that Case, Separation is not a *Sin*, but a *Duty*; we being for ever bound to *obey God rather than Men*.

And Secondly, Supposing they be mistaken in their Judgment, and think that to be unlawful, and forbidden by God, which is not really so; yet so long as this Persuasion continues (though it be a false one) we think they cannot, without Sin, join in our Communion. For even an erroneous Conscience (as we have shewed) binds thus far, that a Man cannot, without Sin, act in Contradiction to it. These Two Things, I say, we grant them, and let them make the best Advantage of them.

But then this is the Point we stand upon, and which, if it be true, will render this

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this whole Plea for Nonconformity upon account of Conscience, as I have now opened it, wholly insufficient, *viz.* If it should prove that our Dissenters are mistaken in their Judgment; and that our Governors do indeed require nothing of them in the matter of Church Communion, but what they may comply with, without Breach of God's Law: Then, I say, it will not acquit them from being guilty of Sin before God in withdrawing from our Communion; to say, that they really believed our Communion to be unlawful; and upon that Account they durst not join with us.

It is not my Province here to answer all their Objections against our Forms of Prayer, our Ceremonies, our Orders and Rules in administering Sacraments, and other Things that concern our Communion: This hath been done several Times; and of late by several Persons who have treated of all these particular Matters; and who have shewed with great Clearness and Strength, that there is nothing required in our Church Appointments, which is in the least inconsistent with, or forbidden by any Law of *Jesus Christ*: But on the contrary, the Establishments of our Church are, for Gravity, Decency, Purity, and Agreeableness with the Primitive Christianity, the most approveable, and the least exceptionable of any Church Constitutions at this Day in the World.

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These Things therefore I meddle not with, but this is the Point I am concerned in, whether, supposing it be every Man's Duty to join in Communion with the Established Church; and there be nothing required in that Communion, but what may be lawfully practised; I say, supposing these Two Things; whether it will be sufficient to acquit any Man from Sin, that withdraws from that Communion, upon this Account, that through his Mistake, he believes he cannot join with us without Sin? Or thus, whether will any Man's Persuasion that there are sinful Terms required in our Communion (when yet there are not any) justify his Separation from us?

This is the General Question truly put; and this I give as the Answer to it: That in general speaking a Man's erroneous Persuasion doth not dissolve the Obligation of God's Law, or justify any Man's Transgression of his Duty. So that if God's Law doth Command me to hold Communion with the Church where I have no just Cause to break it; and I have no just Cause to break it in this particular Case, but only I think I have; my Misperuasion in this Matter doth not discharge me from my Obligation to keep the Communion of the Church; or acquit me from Sin before God, if I break it.

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The Truth and Reason of this I have fully shewed before, in what I have said about the Authority of Conscience. I shall now only by Way of farther Confirmation, ask this Question: Was *St. Paul* guilty of Sin, or no, when he persecuted the *Christians*; being verily persuaded in his own Mind that he ought so to do, and that he sinned if he did not? If any will say that *St. Paul* did not sin in this, because he did not act contrary to his Conscience; they contradict his own express Words: For he acknowledgeth himself to be *the greatest of Sinners*, and that for this very Reason, *because he persecuted the Church of Christ*. If they say that he did sin in doing this; then they must at the same Time acknowledge, that a Man's Persuasion that a Thing is a Duty, will not excuse him from Guilt in practising it; if really and indeed it be against God's Law: And on the other Side, by the same Reason, that a Man's Persuasion that a Thing is unlawful, will not excuse him from Guilt in not practising it; if indeed God's Law hath made it a Duty.

So that it infinitely concerns all our Dissenting Brethren to consider very well what they do, when they withdraw from our Communion. *Schism* undoubtedly is a great and crying Sin; a Sin, against which there are as many hard Things said in the Discourses of our Lord and his Apostles, and
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in the Writings of the Ancient *Christians*, as against any other Sin whatsoever. And therefore let those that forsake our Communion; and set up, or join with other Assemblies in Opposition to ours; I say, let them look to it, that they be not involved in the Guilt of this dreadful Sin. They must be sure that their Separation proceeds upon good Grounds, if they would free themselves from the Imputation of it. It is not always enough to excuse them; that they do believe there are sinful Conditions imposed in our Communion, and consequently it is their Duty to withdraw. For unless the Thing be so indeed; their believing so will not cancel their Obligation to our Church Communion; or make it cease to be *Schism*, to withdraw themselves from it.

This may perhaps at the first Hearing seem very strange Doctrine to many, but yet it is true for all that: and will appear a little more evident, if we put the Case in another Instance, wherein we are not so nearly concerned.

Here is one of the *Roman Catholick* Persuasion (as they call it) that hath been trained up in Popery; and heartily believes it to be the true Religion, and the only One, wherein Salvation is to be had; and therefore in Obedience to the Laws and Customs of that Church, doth pay Religious

ous Worship to Images; doth pray to Saints and Angels, doth give divine Adoration to the consecrated Bread in the Sacrament; as really believing it to be turned into the Body of *Christ*, to which his Soul, and Deity are personally united.

Is now such a Person as this guilty of Idolatry in these Practices, or is he not? He doth verily believe that he is not. He would abhor these Practices, if he did in the least believe that God had forbid them, as idolatrous. Nay, he is so far from believing that they are forbid, that on the contrary, he hath been taught to believe that they are necessary Duties, and he cannot be a good Catholick, unless he thus worship Images, and Saints, and the Bread of the Host. Well, now the Point is, Whether such a Man, believing as he doth, be, upon that Account, acquitted from the Sin of Idolatry? We all grant, that if he had such clear Information about these Things as we Protestants have; he would certainly be an *Idolater*, if he should continue in these Practices; but whether his Belief, and Opinion, and Persuasion concerning these Things, do not excuse him, and make that cease to be *Idolatry*, that would otherwise be so; this, I say, is the Question: But yet none of us make any great Question of it. For we do charge the *Papists* indiscriminately with Idolatry in their Worship,

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notwithstanding their disclaiming it; notwithstanding their Profession to worship God, no otherwise than according to his own Will; notwithstanding they do really think themselves obliged in Conscience, to give divine Worship to the consecrated Elements, and those other Objects. And we charge them rightly in this. For if it *be really* Idolatry, by God's Word, to do these Things, then it will be Idolatry in any Man to do them, let his Opinion about them be what it will: A Man's Ignorance, or Mistake, or false Opinion, doth not alter the Nature of Things; it can neither make that cease to be a Duty, which God hath commanded, nor that cease to be a Sin, which God hath forbidden. All that it will do, is, that according to the Nature and Circumstances of it, it may more or less extenuate the Transgression that is committed upon the Account thereof.

And the Case is just the same in the Matter before us. For any Man to withdraw his Communion from that Church, with which he ought, and with which he may lawfully communicate; that is as properly the Sin of *Schism*, as it is the Sin of *Idolatry*, to give divine Worship to that which is not God. For any Man, therefore, to break the Unity of the Church, though it be upon this very Account, that he doth believe it is his Duty so to do; or that he cannot communicate with that Church without

without Sin ; yet, if this Persuasion of his be false, and erroneous, he is no less a *Schismatick* for all this, than the other Man is an *Idolater*, that thinks it is his Duty to adore Images, and those other undue Objects of divine Worship among the *Romanists*. It is true, the Man's Ignorance, or Misperuasion, will, according to the greater or less *Culpability of it*, more or less excuse the Man's Person before God, as it doth in the other Case. But it cannot, in the least, make that which God hath made to be *Schism*, to be no *Schism*; no more than in the other Case it makes that to be no *Idolatry*, which God's Word hath declared to be *Idolatry*.

Well, now admitting all this; here comes the Pinch of the Thing. It will be said, What would you have a Man to do in this Case? he cannot conform with a safe Conscience, and yet he is a Transgressor if he does not. If he comply against his Conscience, you grant he is guilty of Sin in so doing: If he doth not comply, then you say he is a *Schismatick*, and so is a Sinner upon that Account. Why, to this I say, that both these Things are often true; and here is that *Dilemma*, which Men, by suffering their Minds to be abused with evil Principles and Persuasions, do frequently run themselves into. They are reduced to that Extremity, that they can neither act, nor forbear acting; they

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can neither obey, nor disobey without Sin.

But what is to be done in this Case? I know nothing but this; that all imaginable Care is to be taken, that the Error and false Principles which misled the Man, be deposed; and that his Judgment be better informed; and then he may both do his Duty, which God's Law required of him, and avoid sinning against his Conscience.

But how is this to be done? Why, no other Way, but by using conscientiously all those means which common Prudence will recommend to a Man, for the gaining Instruction and Information to himself, about any Point that he desires thoroughly to understand: That is to say, freeing his Mind from all Pride, and Passion, and Interest, and all other carnal Prepossessions, and applying himself seriously and impartially to the getting right Notions and Sentiments about his Duty in these Matters: Considering, without Prejudice, what can be said on both Sides: Calling in the best Assistance of the ablest and wisest Men that he can come by: And above all Things, seriously endeavouring to understand the Nature and Spirit of the *Christian* Religion, and to practise all that he is undoubtedly convinced to be his Duty; and for the Matters in Question, most earnestly imploring the Assistance of God's Spirit to guide and direct him.

Well, but supposing a Man has endeavoured to inform his Judgment as well as he can, and hath used all those prudent Means that were in his Power, to satisfy himself of the Lawfulness of our Communion, but yet, after all, he is of the same Persuasion that he was, *viz.* That he cannot join in our Worship without Sin; What will we say to such a Man as this? Will we still say, that this Man must either conform, though against his Conscience, or he is a *Schismatick* before God? This is the great Difficulty, and I have two Things to say to it.

In the first Place, We do heartily wish that this was the Case of all, or of the most of our Dissenters (*viz.* that they have done what they can to satisfy themselves about our Communion) for if it was, I do verily persuade myself, that there would presently be an End of all those much to be lamented *Schisms* and *Divisions* which do now give so much Scandal to all good Men, and threaten the Ruin of our Reformed Religion; and this poor Church of *England*, which hath so long laboured and groaned under the furious Attacks that have been made upon her by Enemies without, and Enemies within her own Bowels, would, in a little Time, be perfectly set free from all Apprehension of Danger, at the least, from the one Sort of her Adversaries.

If all our Brethren of the Separation would seriously *follow after the Things that make for Peace*, and *walk by the same Rule*, as far as they were able; and in Things *where they were otherwise minded*, would religiously apply themselves to God for Direction, and to the Use of prudent Means for Satisfaction; I doubt not but the Face of Things would presently be changed among us, and we should hear no more of any Division or *Schism* in our Nation, that was either dangerous to the Church, or to the Salvation of the Men that were concerned in it.

But alas! we fear we have too great Reason to say, that the Generality of our Dissenting Brethren, even those of them that plead Conscience for their Separation, have not done their Duty in this matter; have not heartily endeavoured to satisfy their Minds about the Lawfulness of *Conformity*, in those Points which they stick at.

If they had, one would think, that after all their Endeavours, they should, before they pronounced *Conformity* to be unlawful, be able to produce some one plain Text of Scripture for the proving it so, either in the whole, or in any Part of it. But this they are not able to do. They do, indeed, produce some Texts of Scripture, which they think do make for them; but really they are such, that if they had not supinely

taken up their Meaning upon Trust, but would have been at the Pains of carefully examining them, and using such Helps as they have every where at Hand for the understanding them; it would have been somewhat difficult for them to have expounded those Texts in such a Sense, as would infer the Unlawfulness of our Communion.

But farther; I say, it is not probable that the Generality of our Dissenters, who condemn our Communion as Unlawful, have ever anxiously applied themselves to the considering the Point, or gaining Satisfaction about it, because they do not seem to have much consulted their own Teachers in this Affair, and much less those of our Way: If they had, they would have been disposed to think better of our Communion, than they do. For, not to mention what the Churchmen do teach and press in this matter; the most eminent of their own Ministers are ready, thus far, to give their Testimony to our Communion, That there is nothing required in it, but what a *Lay Person* may Honestly and Lawfully comply with, though there may be some Things inconvenient, and which they wish were amended. Nay, they themselves were ready, upon Occasion, to afford us their Company in all the Instances of *Lay Communion*.

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But I desire not to enlarge upon this Argument, because it is an invidious one. All that I say, is, That we wish it was not too apparent, by many Evidences, that most of those who separate from us, are so far from having done all they can to bring themselves to a Compliance with our Church Constitutions, that they have done little or nothing at all towards it; but have taken up their Opinions, Hand over Head, without much thinking or enquiring; and having once taken up an Opinion, they adhere to it, without scarce so much as once thinking that it is possible for them to be in the Wrong.

If you speak of a Man, that may with Reason be said to have done his Endeavour to satisfy himself about the Points of his Duty in this matter: Give us such a one as hath no End, no Interest to serve by his Religion, but only to please God, and to go to Heaven; and who, in the Choice of the Way that leads thither, hath the Indifference of a Traveller; to whom it is all one, whether his Way light on the right Hand, or the left, being only concerned that it be the Way which leads to his Journey's End.

Give us a Man, that concerns himself as little as you please in the Speculative Disputes and Controversies of Religion, but yet is wonderfully solicitous about the Practice of his Duty, and therefore will re-

A Discourse of Conscience.

use no Pains or Trouble that may give him a right Understanding of that.

Give us a Man, that in the midst of the great Heats and Divisions, and different Communions of the Church, is yet modest, and humble, and docible; that believes he may be mistaken, and that his private Friends may be mistaken too; and hath such an Esteem and Reverence for the Wisdom of his Governors in Church, or State, as to admit, that it is probable they may see farther into Matters of State and Religion, than he doth: And that therefore every Tenet and Opinion that was imbibed in his Education, that was infused by private Men of his Acquaintance, or that was espoused upon a very few Thoughts, and little Consideration, ought not to be so stiffly maintained, as to controul, or to be set in Opposition to the publick Establishment of Authority.

Lastly: Give us a Man, that where the publick Laws do run counter to his private Sentiments, and he is at a Loss to reconcile his Duty to Men with his Duty to God; yet doth not presently, upon this, set up a Flag of Defiance to Authority; but rather applies himself, with all the Indifference and Honesty he can, to get a true Information of these Matters: And to that End, he prays to God continually for his Assistance; he calls in the best Helps, and consults the
best

best Guides he can; his Ears are open to what both Sides can say for themselves; and he is as willing to read a Book which is writ against his Opinion, as one that defends it: In a Word, if he be prejudiced or bias'd any Way, it is on the Side of Authority, being rather desirous to find himself mistaken, and his Governors in the Right, than himself in the Right, and his Governors mistaken. I say, shew us such a Man as this, and we readily grant you have produced a Person that doth sincerely use his Endeavours to satisfy himself about the Lawfulness of our Communion. But then we must say this also, That as the Case stands between the Church of *England* and the Dissenters, we can hardly believe that such a Man will long continue in Separation from the Church; but will, in a little Time, gain the Satisfaction of seeing, not only that he may lawfully join with us, but also that it is his Duty so to do.

But let us admit, that a Man may have endeavoured to inform his Judgment as well as he can, and yet be so far from being convinced that it is his Duty to join with us in our Worship, that he is still of Opinion it is his Duty to separate from us? What will we say of such a Man? Will we still brand him for a *Schismatick*, notwithstanding he hath done all he can to bring himself over to us, but cannot?

To this I answer, in the second Place, according to the Principles I have before laid down, that if such a Case do ever happen; though the Man cannot be excused from *Schism*, as to the *Matter* of it (because wherever there is an actual Separation from a Church, with which we ought, and with which we may lawfully communicate, there is an actual *Schism* commenced, let the Pre-
tence for the Separation be what it will) yet I trust, he shall not be charged before God with the *formal* Guilt of the *Schism*, any farther than the *Error* that led him into it was contracted by his own Fault.

Though *Schism* in itself (as we have said) be a great Sin; yet we do not say, that all those who are engaged in the same *Schism*, are *equally* guilty before God.

In the first Place, Those that separate from the Church, to serve any private secular Turn; these are most horribly guilty of *Schism*, and there is nothing to be said in their Excuse.

In the second Place, Those who separate from the Church, through Mispersuasions, and Mistakes of Judgment, which they groundlessly and foolishly took up, and might have avoided, and would yet still certainly correct in themselves, if they were but so careful and conscientious about their Duty as they ought to be; these Men have, indeed, far more to say for themselves than
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the former, but yet they are very blameable, and are bound, as they love their Souls, to take more Care of informing their Conscience aright, that so they may leave that Sin they are engaged in.

But thirdly, Those that separate from the Church of God, because they know no better, nor ever had Means to know better; or those that have sincerely endeavoured to understand their Duty, as much as could be expected from one in their Circumstances; yet, through Weakness of Understanding, or Want of Opportunity, light into wrong Paths: In a Word, those that are unhappily engaged in a *Schism*, but God Almighty, who searcheth the Hearts, knoweth that it is not through the Fault of their Wills, but the Misfortune of their Circumstances: I say, if there be any Man among us that is in this Condition, though he be a *Schismatick* materially, yet he is innocently, at least pitiably, so: And if he be as free from Blame in the other Parts of his Life, he may be a good *Christian* for all that. And God Almighty, we hope, who judgeth of Men by their inward Sincerity, and not by their outward Circumstances, will impute that *Schism* (which in others, perhaps, is a wilful Crime) to this Man, no otherwise than as a pure *Sin of Ignorance*, which shall not (upon a general Repentance for all Sins, known and unknown) be accounted

counted for at the last Day. Especially, if this innocently mistaken Man we speak of, do, to the other Regularities of his Life, add a diligent Care in these four following Points.

First, That he be not *obstinate* and *per-tinacious* in his Way, but that he keep his Mind readily prepared and disposed to receive any Conviction, which God, by any Means or Instruments, shall offer to him.

Secondly, That he separate no farther from the Church, of which he ought to be a Member, than he needs must; but do chearfully comply with the publick Laws and Establishments, in all those Instances, where he is satisfied he may do it with a safe Conscience.

Thirdly, That where he cannot give *active* Obedience to the Laws, he do, in those Instances, *patiently* and *christianly* submit to the Penalties which those Laws inflict; neither exclaiming against his Governors, or the Magistrates, as Persecutors, for enacting or executing those Laws; nor using any undue, illegal Means, to get himself more Ease and Liberty; but in all Things behaving himself as a quiet and peaceable Subject to the Government he lives under.

And fourthly, and lastly, That he shew himself a good *Neighbour*, as well as a good
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Subject, in avoiding all peevish and bitter Censures of those that differ in Opinion and Persuasion from him; and exercising Humanity, and Friendliness, and Charity to all his *Fellow-christians*.

Whoever, I say, of our Brethren of the Separation, make good these Points: That is to say, are, in the first Place, very sincere in their Endeavours to inform their Conscience aright in the Matter of our Communion: And, in the next place, when they cannot satisfy their Conscience about our Way, do yet, in their Dissent from us, observe the four Particulars I have now named; I should be loth, for my part, to censure them either as ill *Men*, or ill *Subjects*, or ill *Christians*.

But then, all that I have said in this Matter, doth no more justify the Sin of *Schism*, or extenuate the Heinousness of it in its own Nature, than it would serve to justify or extenuate the Sin of Idolatry, if all that I have now said, was applied to the Case of an ignorant, well-meaning, devout Papist. For I do verily believe, that what I have now represented, by Way of Apology, for an innocent, mistaken *Separatist*, will hold true, *mutatis mutandis*, in the Case of a deluded *Romanist*, who is invincibly, and without any Fault of his, intangled in the Practice of their *Idolatries*. But I believe, for all that, the Sin of *Idolatry*

try is in itself a most grievous Sin, and so I believe is the Sin of *Schism*; and therefore, notwithstanding all that may be said concerning the Innocence or Excuseableness of some Mens Mistakes about these Matters; yet nevertheless, it infinitely concerns every Person to have a Care how he be engaged either in the one or the other.

To come to a Conclusion: That which I would most seriously press, from what hath been said, is this; it appears from the foregoing Discourse, how absolutely necessary it is, that every Man should endeavour to inform his Judgment aright in the Matters that offend his Conscience, before he withdraw his Obedience from his lawful Governors, and his Communion from those that worship God in Publick under them. It appears likewise, that it is not enough to justify a Man's Separation, that this or the other Thing in our Worship is really against his Conscience; for he may be a great Sinner, notwithstanding that, for leaving our Assemblies, if it should prove at last that he is mistaken in his Notions.

What therefore should every Dissenter among us do, that hath any Regard to his Duty, and would preserve a good Conscience? I say, What is there that more concerns him to do, than presently to set about the true informing of his Judgment in the Points where he is now dissatisfied, for fear
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he be found to live in a grievous Sin, all the Time he separates from us.

And therefore, let no Man that lives out of our Communion, satisfy himself with such frivolous Pretences as these: That as for all the *Substantials* of Religion, the Matters of *Faith* and *good Life*, they do agree with us; and that as for the other Matters which concern *Ceremonies* and *Discipline*, these are nice, controverted Points, Points disputed *pro* and *con* amongst the Divines; and therefore why should they trouble their Heads about them; nay, perhaps, if they should, they have neither Abilities nor Opportunities to understand them.

It must be confessed, that something of this is true; but yet it is nothing to their Purpose. It is very well that we all agree in the *Rule* of *Faith* and Manners; and it would be happy if all the Christian World did so too: But still, Schism is a dreadful Sin; and a Man may as certainly, without Repentance, be damned for that, as for being an *Heretick* in his *Opinion*, or a *Drunkard*, for Instance, in his *Manners*. Sure I am, the ancient Christian Fathers thought so.

It is true likewise, that the Business of *Church Government* and *Discipline*, and other Points of *Ecclesiastical Conformity* is a Matter of Dispute and Controversy among us: But who is it that made it so? The Church of *England*, without Doubt, would have

have been very well pleased, if there had been no Dust raised, no Dispute or Contentions moved in these Matters, but that every Member would have done his Duty peaceably and quietly in his Station: Or, that, if any Controversy had arose, it should have been debated among learned Men, and never have proceeded to Separation from the Communion.

We do not pretend to lay any Stress upon Skill and Knowledge about these matters, in order to a Man's Salvation. We believe and teach, that a Man may be a very good *Christian*, and go to Heaven, that never understood how to justify the *Cross* in *Baptism*, or to defend the *Common Prayer-book* against all the Exceptions that are made against it. All that we say, is, that if any Man will scruple and except against the Use of these Things, it lies upon him, nay, he is bound, as he would keep a good Conscience, to use the best Means he possibly can, to get Satisfaction about them: Or if he do not, at his own Peril be it; nay, even at the Peril of his Salvation, if he breaks the Church's *Peace* and *Communion* upon that Account.

And as for those that pretend that these are *subtile* Points, and above their Reach and Capacity, and they have not *Understanding* and *Wit* enough to dive into them: Why, in God's Name, who desires them? We say, that they might innocently enough,
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and with a good Conscience, comply with their Governors in these Points, as they do in a hundred others, without ever diving into them. But since, it seems, they have *Wit* and *Understanding* enough to cavil and find Fault with these Things, and upon that Account to deny their Obedience to those lawful Powers which GOD hath set over them, one would think, they should, at the same Time, have so much *Honesty*, as seriously to endeavour to give themselves Satisfaction as to those Things they find Fault with: And this is all we desire of them; and it is for their own Sake too, as well as ours, that we desire it. For otherwise they will never be able to answer, either to GOD or Man, for the horrible Inconveniencies and Mischiefs that arise to the Church of *Christ*, by the Division and Separation which they are engaged in.

To conclude: If in any Instance, that famous Precept of the Apostle, of *proving all Things, and holding fast that which is good*, do oblige *Christians*, it doth especially in this. If ever it be a Man's Duty to satisfy himself about the Goodness and Lawfulness of a Thing that he is apt to doubt of, it is certainly in the Case where his Superiors have laid their Commands upon him; for there he cannot disobey without Sin, unless he can assure himself that he hath done all that he can to reconcile their
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Commands with his Duty to God; but upon the best means he hath used, he finds them irreconcilable. For a Man to disobey, till he has done this, is an unwarrantable Thing; and, in the Case that I now speak of, it is no less than the Sin of *formal criminal Schism*.



THE

THE CASE OF A

Doubting Conscience.

I Have in a former Discourse spoken to the Case of those Dissenters, who separate from the Established Church for this Reason, That they are *persuaded* that they cannot lawfully join in our Communion. I now come to speak to the Case of those who separate from us for a less Reason, *viz.* Because they *doubt* whether they may lawfully communicate with us or no; and so long as they thus *doubt*, they dare not come near us, because they fear they should sin against God, if they should do any Action with a *Doubting Conscience*.

To this indeed a short Answer might be given from the former Discourse, and that is this, That let the Obligation of a *Doubting Conscience* be as great as we can reasonably suppose it; yet if Communion with our Church, as it is established, be really a

Duty, then a Man's *Doubts* concerning the Lawfulness of it, will not make it cease to be so, or justify his Separation from it. For if a Man's settled *Persuasion*, that an Action is unlawful, will not ordinarily acquit him from Sin, if he omit that Action, supposing God's Law hath commanded it (as I there shewed) much less will a Man's bare *Doubt* concerning the Lawfulness of an Action, justify his Omission of it in such a Case.

But because this Answer seems rather to cut the Knot, than to untie it; it is my Meaning in the following Discourse, particularly to examine and discuss this Plea of a *Doubting Conscience*, and to shew what little Force there is in it, to keep any Man from Conformity, that would otherwise conform. Hoping that some Reader, whose Case this is, may, by what he finds here offered toward his Satisfaction, either be prevailed with to lay aside his Doubts in the Matter of our Communion, or at least be convinced, that it is more reasonable and safe to communicate with us, doubting as he doth, than to continue in Separation from us.

In handling this Case of a *Doubting Conscience*, I shall observe the same Method I did in the former Discourse, because indeed I cannot think of a better; that

that is, I shall endeavour to give an Account of these four Things.

I. Of the *Nature* of a *Doubting Conscience*, and how it is distinguished from the other Kinds of *Conscience*.

II. Of the *Rule* of a *Doubting Conscience*, or what Measures a Man is to proceed by, for the determining himself in a doubtful Case.

III. Of the *Power* that *Human Laws*, Ecclesiastical or Civil, have, to *Over-rule* a Man's *Doubts* in any Matter.

IV. Of the *Authority* of a *Doubting Conscience*, *i. e.* Whether at all, or how far a Man is *Obliged* by it.

These four Heads do, I think, take in all the Difficulties that are in the Case of a *Doubting Conscience*.

I. I begin with the first Head, The *Nature* of a *Doubting Conscience*. In speaking to which, I shall treat of these three Things. 1. Of *Doubting* in general. 2. Of such *Doubts*, as do affect or concern a Man's *Conscience*. 3. Of the Difference between the *Doubting Conscience*, and the *Scrupulous*.

1. As to the first of these, which is concerning the *Nature* of *Doubting* in general, we may take Notice, That a Man is properly said to *doubt*, when he cannot give his Assent to either part of a Contradiction; that

is; cannot make a Judgment whether the Thing he is considering, be so, or be not so; but through the equal, or at least fair Probability that is on both Sides of the Question, continues irresolute and undetermined; now, perhaps, he thinks this Side the more probable, and by-and-by the other, but he is uncertain as to both, and cannot fix upon either.

So that a *doubting* Mind is not more usually, than properly, resembled to a *Balance*, which, by Reason of the equal Weight which is put into both Scales, is not cast on either Side, but hangs in the same Posture, or waves up and down, without either Scale coming to the Bottom.

Nevertheless, in a doubtful Case, a Man may lean more to one Side of the Question than the other, and yet continue doubtful still. Just as there may be so much more Weight put into one Scale than the other, as will be sufficient to incline the Balance more to that Side; while yet that Weight is not so considerable, as to be able perfectly to turn it, so as to carry down the Scale to the usual mark of Down-weight, and there to settle it.

There is indeed this Difference between these two Things, that a Balance, through the exact Equality of the Weights put into each Scale, may be so poised, as to hang perfectly in *Æquilibrio*, without Inclination
either

either Way, and continue so to do: But it will be difficult, if not impossible, to put a Cause or a Question, where a Man's mind, after all Things considered, is so perfectly indifferent to both Sides of it, as not to be more inclined to chuse one, than the other.

When once there appears so much more Evidence on the one Side of the doubtful Case, that the Mind is enabled to determine itself, and to give a settled Assent on that Side, then the Man ceaseth to doubt any longer; for that which was a *Doubt* before, is now turned into a *Persuasion*. And if it be a Case wherein Conscience is concerned, that which was before a *doubting* Conscience, is now changed into a *resolved* Conscience. Here, to resume our former Comparison, the Balance no longer hangs in *Æquilibrio*, or moves unsettledly this Way or that Way, but is plainly turned and fixed on one Side.

It is true, in this Case a Man doth not always determine himself with the same Degree of Persuasion, or Satisfaction to his own mind. Sometimes the Evidence is so strong, as to command an entire Assent of his Understanding; an Assent so full, that it hath not the least Mixture of Doubtfulness in it; and this we call an *Assurance*, or *full Persuasion*. At other Times the

Evidence may be of Force enough to gain an Assent, but yet not so strong an Assent as to exclude all Doubt of the contrary; and this Kind of Assent we call an *Opinion*, or a *probable Persuasion*. And something like this we may observe in the Balance: The Scale that preponderates, is not always carried down with the same Force and Briskness; but according as the Weight that turns the Balance is greater, or less, so, in Proportion, it may plainly be discerned that the Scale descends either more strongly and nimbly, or more weakly and slowly. But still in both these Cases, the Man hath formed a Judgment of the Point; the Balance is turned, and wherever this happens, there is an End of the Doubt or *Æquilibrium*; and consequently, if it be in a Case that concerns a Man's Conscience, it ceases to be any longer a doubting Conscience, and becomes resolved and determined, though perhaps not fully satisfied and free from all Kind of Doubt and Scruple about that Thing.

2. And thus much of *Doubting* in general. I now come to consider it with Respect to *Conscience*, i. e. to enquire how far, or in what Cases a Man's Conscience is affected with his Doubts? Which is our second Point under this Head.

There are a thousand Cases, in which a Man may be doubtful, as to which his
Conscience

Conscience shall be no Way concerned. A Man's Doubts may indeed be as various as are the Objects he hath to consider, and to make a Judgment of; and therefore unless we will say, that every Thing that a Man thinks of, or saith, or doth, affects his Conscience, we must not say that every Doubt doth.

As a Man's Conscience is not touched or affected with any Thing but his own Actions; so neither do a Man's Doubts affect or touch his Conscience, any farther than they concern his Actions. So that Doubts about Matters of meer *Speculation* (as whether such a Proposition be true or false) and likewise Doubts about Matter of *Fact* (as whether such a Thing was done or not done) which do not relate to the Government of a Man's own Actions, these Doubts do not concern his Conscience.

As a Man's Conscience is not affected with his own Actions, under any other Notion or Consideration, than only as God's Law is to regulate them, *viz.* as they are either commanded by that Law, or forbidden by it: So neither do a Man's Doubts concerning his Actions, affect his Conscience any farther, or upon any other Account, than only as God's Law may be transgressed by doing or not doing the Action he doubts of; that is, as he may sin against God, either by omitting the Action,

when God's Law hath commanded it, or by doing it, when God's Law hath forbidden it.

So that in all doubtful Cases, where a Man apprehends no Danger of transgressing God's Law, whether he doth the Action he doubts about, or doth it not, there his Conscience is not properly concerned.

And this is so true, that tho' we should suppose one Side of the Action in Question to be really, all Things considered, more expedient and more eligible than the other; yet so long as we are satisfied that we may, without Breach of God's Law, chuse either Side, we are not concerned in Conscience to chuse that Side which is the most expedient, or the most eligible. For the Truth of this, besides the Reason of the Thing, we have the Authority of St. *Paul*, who when this Case was proposed to him, Whether it was better for the *Christians* in those Times to marry, or not to marry? He thus resolves, That though indeed, as Things then stood, it was better not to marry, yet they might do what they would; for if they did marry, they sinned not: And though (as he saith) *he that gave not his Virgin in Marriage, did better than he that gave her in Marriage*; yet he allows, that *he that gave her in Marriage did well*, and consequently did act with a good Conscience. *Vid. 1 Cor. vii.*

3. From what hath been said, we may be able to give a clear Account of the Nature of a *Doubting Conscience*, and to distinguish it from the other Sorts of Conscience; particularly that which they call the *Scrupulous*, which is our third Point under this Head.

Conscience is usually, though how properly I will not now dispute, distributed into these three Kinds, the *Resolved*, the *Scrupulous*, and the *Doubting*.

When we speak of a *resolved* Conscience, every Body knows that we mean no more by that Phrase than this, that a Man is satisfied and resolved in his own Mind, concerning the Action he hath been deliberating upon, *viz.* that he is bound to *do* it, as being a *Duty*; or that he is bound to *forbear* it, as being a *Sin*; or that he may either *do* it, or *forbear* it, as being an *indifferent* Action, neither commanded, nor forbidden by God. Now this Persuasion, if it be according to the Rule of the divine Law, we call it a *right* Conscience: If it be contrary to that Rule, we call it an *erroneous* Conscience. But of this we need speak no more here, since it was the whole Argument of the former Discourse.

As for the *scrupulous* Conscience, as that is made a distinct Sort of Conscience from the *Resolved* and the *Doubting*, we may thus define it: *It is a Conscience in some measure*

measure resolved, but yet accompanied with a Fear of acting according to that Resolution. It is the Unhappiness of a great many, that when they are pretty well satisfied in their Judgment concerning this or the other Point, which they made a Matter of Conscience, and have nothing considerable to object against the Evidence that is given them, but, on the contrary, are convinced that they ought, or that they may lawfully act thus or thus; yet for all that, when they come to act, they are very uneasy, and make a World of Difficulties. Not that there is any new Reason appears that can pretend to unsettle, much less overthrow the Grounds of their first Determination; but only their unaccountable *Fears* must pass for *Reasons*. This now is to have a *scrupulous* Conscience in the proper Sense.

But a *doubting* Conscience (which is that we are now concerned in) though in common Speech it be often confounded with the *Scrupulous*, is quite different from both these Sorts of Conscience. For in both those, a Man is supposed to have passed a Judgment in his Mind, whether the Action before him be according to God's Law, or against it. But in the Case of a *doubting* Conscience, it appears, from what I have said, that a Man hath not, nor cannot, so long as he doubts, make any Judgment at all, but is uncertain as to both Sides; hav-
ing,

ing, as he thinks, as many Arguments to incline him one Way, as the other; and when once he comes to have so much Evidence, as to create a *Persuasion* or *Opinion* on one Side, then he ceaseth to have a *doubting Conscience*.

So that the true Definition of a *doubting Conscience*, as it is commonly called, is this: *The Suspence of a Man's Judgment in a Question about the Duty or the Sin of an Action, occasioned by the equal (or near equal) Probabilities on both Sides.*

And likewise, the true Difference between a *Doubting*, a *Resolved*, and a *Scrupulous Conscience*, is this; That the *resolved Conscience* is satisfied about its Point, and acts *confidently*, at least *cheerfully*: The *scrupulous Conscience* is likewise satisfied in the general, but either dares not act, or acts *fearfully*. The *doubting Conscience* is not satisfied at all; for the Point before it, is still a *Question*, of which it can make no Judgment, no Resolution, because of the equal Appearance of Reason on both Sides.

This is a plain Account of the *doubting Conscience*. But after all, it must be acknowledged, that this which we call a *doubting Conscience*, and which we have been all this while discoursing of, is, truly and strictly speaking, so far from being any particular Sort or Kind of Conscience, as we

we have hitherto supposed it, that it is no Conscience at all.

Conscience, as we have often said, is a *Man's Mind, making a Judgment about the Morality of his Actions*; but that which we are now talking of, is a *Man's Mind making no Judgment* as to that Point, but continuing wavering, and undetermined. Now, how a *Man's Judgment*, and his *no Judgment*, which are the Contradictories to one another, should agree in the same common Nature of *Conscience*, is not easy to be understood. The Truth is, by the same Logick or Propriety of Speech, that we say a *doubting Conscience*, we may also, if we please, say an *unresolved Resolution*, or a *Persuasion* without an *Assent*. But however, because Use hath given the Name of Conscience to the *doubting Mind*, and because Conscience is sometimes really concerned about acting in *doubtful Cases*, I chuse to follow the common Way of Speaking.

II. I now proceed to our *second* general Head, which is concerning the *Rule* of a *doubting Conscience*.

In speaking to this, I shall do these two Things; *viz.* I shall shew,

First, What *Kind of Rule* we here speak of; that is, which Conscience needs in a doubtful Case.

Secondly, What that *Rule* is, or wherein it doth consist.

1. As to the First of these. When we speak of the *Rule* of a *doubting Conscience*, we do not mean such a *Rule*, by which a Man shall be enabled to resolve all his *Doubts* concerning every Point, so as that he shall cease to doubt any longer concerning that Point: But we mean only such a *Rule*, by which a Man may be directed how to determine himself in every *doubtful* Case, so as to act with a safe Conscience, whether he can get rid of his *Doubts* or not.

There is just as much Difference between these two Things, as there is between *Doubting*, for Instance, whether a Thing in general, be lawful, or not lawful; and *doubting* what I am to do in a particular Case, where I doubt of the Lawfulness of the Thing. The first of which *Doubts*, the Casuists call a *Speculative Doubt*, the other a *Practical*.

It is plain, that a Man may often very easily come to a Resolution of this latter Kind of *Doubt*; that is, be very well satisfied what it becomes him to do, as to this present Action, without being able to resolve his *Doubt* of the former Kind.

Thus, for Instance, a Man may not be able to resolve this Question, Whether it be lawful, or not lawful, to play at Cards or Dice? Which is the *Speculative Doubt*, as the Schools call it: But he may be very able to resolve this Question, What is most reason-

reasonable for him to do, in the Case of such a Doubt? Again, a Man may not be able to resolve this Doubt, Whether the present War, in which his Prince is engaged, be a just War or no? But yet he may be very well able to satisfy himself as to the *practical* Doubt; that is, what is his Duty to do, in Case his Prince command him to serve in that War, concerning which he doth thus doubt?

Now, it is the Doubts of this latter Kind, these *practical* Doubts, as they are called, that Conscience is directly and immediately concerned; and consequently, for the resolving of which, it chiefly needs a Rule to direct it. For if a Man can but get satisfied what is most agreeable to his Duty to do, as to the present Action he doubts about, it is no great matter, as to his Conscience, whether he can get his *general* or *speculative* Doubts about that Action resolved, or no. These Kind of Doubts, if they cannot be *resolved*, must be *over-ruled*.

The Truth is, it is a very idle Thing, for Men to talk, that a Man must do no Action, till all his Doubts about it be resolved. Thus far, we grant, it concerns him, that his Doubts should be resolved, *viz.* That he should be satisfied in his own Mind, that that Side of the Action he determines himself to, is, all Things considered; the more fit and reasonable to be

chosen:

chosen: And to direct a Man in making such a Choice, is our principal Business under this Head. But if it be meant, that a Man must so resolve all his Doubts about an Action, as to see clearly through all the speculative Points which occasion his Doubts, so as to be able to untie all the Difficulties which before entangled his Understanding, and from intrinsick Arguments, drawn from the Nature of the Thing, to pronounce concerning the Merits of the Question; I say, if this be their meaning, there is nothing more absurd than to say, that a Man is not to do an Action, 'till he hath resolved or disposed all his Doubts about it.

For in many Cases this is utterly impossible to be done; the Person concerned, perhaps, having no sufficient Means for the obtaining such a Resolution of his Doubts as we spoke of; or if he had, the Case may be such, as will not allow him sufficient Time of Consideration for the doing it, for he must either act or not act presently; and he is in equal Perplexity, both as to the one, and as to the other. What now, in such a Case, can a Man possibly do, more than this? *viz.* by his own Reason, and the Advice of his Friends, to get satisfied what is most reasonable, and most agreeable to his Duty, for him to do in the present Circumstances, and to proceed accordingly; for as for other Kind of Resolution of his Doubts,

as

as Things stand with him, he hath not the least Prospect of it.

And indeed, when all is said, we see *de facto*, that this is the usual Way of proceeding among Men, even those that are very honest and conscientious. I dare say, if we take all the doubtful Cases that happen, where there is one Case, in which a Man proceeds to Action, upon such a Resolution of his Doubts, as we before spoke of, there are ten Cases where the Doubt is *over-ruled*, and the Man proceeds to Action without such a Resolution, sitting down satisfied with this, that though he cannot answer the Difficulties on both Sides, yet, all Things considered, it is most reasonable for him in the present Circumstances, to act thus, rather than otherwise; for this he takes to be most agreeable to his general Duty; or this is that which wise and good Men, whom he hath consulted, do advise him to.

And now, having sufficiently explained what Kind of Resolution of Doubts that is, which a Man's Conscience stands in Need of, in order to his acting safely in a doubtful Case,

2. I come to the Second Question upon this Head, which is, What that *Rule* is, by which we are to proceed, in thus resolving our *Doubts*, or determining ourselves to one Side or other, in any doubtful Case that happens to us.

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In answer to this Enquiry, I shall do these two Things. *First*, I shall give some Account of the *general Rule* by which a *Doubting Conscience* is to be guided. *Secondly*, I shall apply this general Rule to the several Heads of doubtful Cases, wherein a Man's Conscience may be concerned; that so every one may be furnished with some Principles, for the determining himself in any Matter, concerning which he happens to have a *Doubt*.

I. As to the first of these, Whoever hath considered what we have before said, will easily be persuaded, that nothing ought to turn the *Balance*, in a doubtful Case, but the greater Weight of *Reason* on one Side than the other. For since the very Notion of Doubting, is the *Suspence of a Man's Judgment in a Question, upon Account of the equal Appearances of Reason on both Sides of it*; it is plain, that that which is to settle the *Judgment*, and to determine the *Doubt*, can be nothing else but this, *viz.* That, after all Things considered, there doth appear greater *Reason* to lie on this Side of the Question, than there doth on that. So that the general Rule of a doubting Conscience, and from which the Measures of resolving all particular Cases, are to be taken, cannot be laid down otherwise than thus; *viz.* *That in all doubtful Cases, that Side which,*

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all Things duly considered, doth appear more reasonable, that is to be chosen.

I am not ignorant that the Casuists have usually proposed this Rule in other Terms, *viz. That in all Doubtful Cases, the safer Side is to be followed.* But I do purposely avoid the expressing it so, because of the *uncertain* Meaning of the *safer Side*. For according as that Word is expounded (as it may be expounded different Ways) so is the Rule so worded, true or false.

If we take *Safety* in the strict and proper Sense, and as it is, indeed, usually understood, *viz.* as it is opposed to any *Hazard* or *Danger*; it is so far from being an adequate Rule of a doubting Conscience, in all Cases, to follow the *safer Side*, that in many Cases it will be very unadvisable so to do.

Sure I am, that in doubtful Cases, which concern the *Civil* Life, no wise Man doth always make this a Rule to himself. We see a hundred Instances every Day, where Men venture upon the less *safe*, and the more *hazardous* Side, upon the Account of other Reasons and Considerations, which they think ought more to prevail with them.

It is certainly, in general Speaking, more *safe* (that is, more free from *Hazard* or *Danger*) to travel on *Foot*, than on *Horseback*; to stay at *Home*, than to go into *foreign Countries*; to traffick by *Land*, than
to

to venture one's Stock on the uncertain *Seas*. But yet, for all this, the Consideration of the Ease and Expedition that is to be had in the first Case, and the Improvement and Benefit that is to be hoped for in the second, and the Gain and Profit in the last, do we see every Day over-balance the Consideration of *Safety* in these Cases, and determine a Man not to that Side which is freest from *Danger*, but to that which is more convenient, or more useful, or more advantageous.

And thus it is likewise, as to those *doubtful Cases*, wherein a Man's *Conscience* is concerned. I suppose, that when we speak of the *safer Side* of any Action, with Reference to *Conscience*, we generally mean that Side, on which there appears the least *Hazard* or *Danger* of transgressing any Law of God. But now, in this Sense of *Safety*, I do not think that it is always a good Rule for a *doubting Conscience*, to chuse the *safer Side*: On the contrary, I think, that if the Rule be thus put, and thus understood, it will often prove a Snare to a Man's Mind, and rather entangle him farther in Difficulties, than help him out of them.

If it was received as a Rule, That a Man is, in all his Actions, to keep himself at the greatest Distance he can, from the Danger of sinning (which is the Notion of *Safety* I here speak of) I dare say, there

are very few Persons that converse much in the World, but have Reason, almost every Day, to call themselves to Account for transgressing this Rule. For they do every Day engage in such Actions, in which they cannot but acknowledge, that they do expose themselves to a greater Danger of sinning, than if they had not engaged in them.

Thus, for Instance, what Man is there among us, who, although he know himself to be prone enough to the Sin of *Intemperance*, in eating or drinking, when Temptations are offered; and accordingly, for this Reason, doth most seriously set himself against this particular Sin; yet makes any great Scruple of going to *Feasts* and *Entertainments*, when he is invited by others; nay, or of making them himself, when *Decency*, or *Civility*, or the serving any of his *temporal* Affairs, doth require him so to do? But yet it is certain, that by thus doing, he runs a much greater Hazard of falling into the Sin he fears, than if he should forbear all such Occasions or Temptations of Intemperance.

Many other Instances, which daily occur in human Life, might be given, wherein good Men, nay, even the best of Men do, for the Sake of their Business, or other laudable Designs, which they think fit to pursue, frequently venture to expose themselves to such *Dangers* of sinning, as they might

might have avoided; and this without any Reproach from their own Conscience, or any Censure from other Men.

The Truth is, GOD hath no where commanded us to avoid all possible *Danger* of *sinning*, but only to avoid all *Sin* when we are in *Danger*. It is enough for the securing a Man's Duty, that he doth not transgress the Laws of GOD in any Action that he takes in Hand: But it is not required that he should, in every Instance of his Conversation, preserve himself from the utmost Possibility, or (if you will) *Danger* of so doing. For, upon this Supposition, it would be impossible for one to live like a Man of this World, and perform the common Offices of Civil Life, and much more to live to any great Purposes for the serving his Generation. Indeed, the Result of all would be, that whoever would approve himself to be truly *religious* and *conscientious*, must abandon all secular Affairs, and retire to a Cloister or a Desert.

But it may be said, What is this to our Business? Those we now spoke of, are supposed to be fully satisfied in their own Minds, that they may safely venture on the more dangerous Side of an Action, for the sake of some considerable Good that they design in that Action: But the Case we are now concerned in, is that of one who is altogether doubtful whether he may lawfully

do the Action or no. To this I answer, That my Business is now to give an Account of the Rule, by which Men are to proceed, in determining themselves in doubtful Cases; and that which I have said, doth thus far, I think, come home to that Business, that if it be allowed that it is adviseable in any Case, to forsake the more *safe* Side of an Action; and to chuse the most *hazardous*; we will take it for granted, that it may be as adviseable in a *doubtful* Case, as in any other, until it be made appear, that God hath appointed a Rule for *doubting* Persons to govern themselves by, different from that he hath given to other Men: Or, to speak the Thing more plainly, till it be made to appear, that those who are so unhappy as to *doubt*, are debarred of the Privilege of acting according to the best of their *Reason* and *Discretion*; which Men that do not *doubt* are allowed to do.

But to come more strictly to the Point, I do believe there do abundance of *doubtful* Cases, properly so called, frequently happen, in which no Man of Understanding, although we suppose him never so honest, doth think he is obliged to determine himself to that Side of the Action, on which he apprehends there is least Danger of sinning: But on the contrary, he will often forsake that Side which is *safer*, in this Sense, for that which doth

doth more recommend itself to him upon other Accounts.

Thus for Instance, sometimes *doubtful* Cases do happen, in which the greater *Probability* on one Side, will turn the Balance against the greater *Safety* on the other. Thus, if a Man should *doubt*, whether it may be lawful to eat any Thing *strangled*, or that hath Blood in it (because there are some Passages in the Scripture, that seem to forbid these Meats) and should repair to some intelligent Person about this Matter, who should give him such an Account of those Texts, and of all the other Difficulties in this Affair, that the Man comes away satisfied, that it is far more probable that all Kinds of Meats are allowed by the Christian Religion, than that any are forbidden.

I ask now, Whether this Degree of Satisfaction have not Weight enough to put an End to a Man's Doubt in such a Case as this, so as that he may, with a quiet Conscience, eat of these Meats as there is Occasion? I believe most Men will be of this Opinion; but yet, the Doubt here is not determined on the *safer* Side, but on the more *unsafe*. For it is certain, a Man is in less Danger of sinning, if he wholly forbear these Meats, than if, for the serving a present Convenience, he do eat of them. And the Reason is plain; because there are fair Grounds from the Scripture, and Antiquity,

for making it a *Question*, whether these Meats be lawful or no; and it is really yet a *Question* among many, and it was lately so to the Man himself: But no Man in the World ever made a *Question*, whether these Meats might not at any Time be lawfully forborn, there being no Law of GOD pretended, that obliges a Man to eat of them.

Again, As the greater *Probability* will turn the Balance against the *safer* Side of a Doubt; so oftentimes such doubtful Cases do happen, in which, when the *Probabilities* are equal on both Sides, the Consideration of the greater *temporal Advantages* on the one Side, will have Weight enough with a very honest Man, to overbalance the Consideration of the greater *Safety* on the other. [Still taking *Safety* in the Sense we before gave.]

Thus, for Instance, Suppose one should demand of another Man a Sum of Money which he pretends to be due to him; and the Man, of whom it is demanded, after the strictest and most conscientious Enquiry he can make, is not satisfied in his own Mind that it is due. But such is the Confidence of the Demander, and such Appearances of Reason he offers, that the Man comes to doubt *equally*, whether it be due or no; so that there are here equal *Probabilities* on both Sides. The Thing in *Question* now is, Whether it be adviseable in Point of Conscience,

for the Man to pay the Money demanded, till he have better Evidence of the Justice of the Demands?

If a Man be to follow the *safer* Side, it is certain he must pay it. For it is undeniably more safe, that is, farther removed from the Danger of Sin, to satisfy the Demands, though it be to his own Loss. For by this Means he perfectly sets himself free from the Apprehensions even of the Possibility of wronging his Neighbour, which is the Sin that he fears in this Case: Whereas if he do not pay the Money, he is uncertain whether he detains the Man's Right from him or no.

But then, on the other Hand, if he should pay the Money when it is no Way due (as he hath as much Reason to believe that it is not due, as that it is) how shall he answer to his Wife and Children, for parting with such a Sum, which, as his Circumstances may be, he cannot spare without great Prejudice to them?

This is the Case, and these are the Arguments that are to be urged on both Sides of it; and I leave it to any considering Man to judge which ought to prevail. I am pretty confident, that most Men will thus determine, *viz.* That since in this Case it is as probable, that the Demands aforesaid are *Unjust*, as that they are *Just*; and since no Man is *obliged* to depart from that he is possessed

feſſed of, till it do appear by good Evidence, that it is due to another Man: And ſince, withal, it is *unreaſonable* ſo to do, when it will be to the Prejudice of a Man's ſelf and his Family; theſe Things being ſo, it will be more adviſeable for the Man, in this Caſe, to keep his Money, till it be either by Law adjudged, or he have more convincing Proofs to his own Conſcience, that he ought to pay it.

I think I need not uſe either more Inſtances, or more Words, to ſhew that it is not always a *Rule* to a *doubting* Conſcience, to chuſe the *ſafer Side* of the Doubt, taking the *ſafer Side* for that which is at the greateſt Diſtance from the Danger of ſin-ning: It being abundantly plain, that many doubtful Caſes may, and do happen, in which, though one Side may appear farther removed from the Danger of tranſgreſſing GOD's Law; yet while it doth not appear that the other Side is *unlawful*, and withal it is evident, that upon other Accounts that Side is more eligible to a prudent Perſon, no good Man (if he be but as *wiſe* as he is *good*) will make any Difficulty of *waving* the *ſafer Side* for the more *prudent*, and that without thinking himſelf ever the leſs *conſcientious* for ſo doing.

But after all this, if on the other Hand, any Man have another Notion of *Safety*, than that we have now been ſpeaking of; that

that is to say, will enlarge the Signification of the Word, and will call by the Name of the *safer Side*, not that which hath only this to recommend it, that it is *farther removed from the Danger of sinning*; but that which is *freest from all Dangers and Inconveniencies of all Kinds whatsoever*: So as that shall always be the *safer Side* of a *doubtful Case*, which, after all Things considered, doth appear to be most agreeable to the Man's *Duty* in the Circumstances he is in, or which is attended with the fewest *Aburdities* and evil *Consequences* of all Sorts, and doth best serve all the Interests *spiritual* and *temporal*, taking both together, that a *wise* and a *good* Man can propose to himself: I say, if any Man do mean this by the *safer Side*, I do readily agree with him, that it will for ever, and in all Cases, be a *true*, and a *wise*, and a *good* Rule (nay, I add, the *only* one, to a *doubting* Conscience) to follow the *safer Side*.

But then, in this Sense of *Safety*, the *safer Side*, and the more *reasonable*, is all one Thing. And consequently this Rule of following the *safer Side*, and that I before laid down, of following the *more reasonable*, are the same in Sense, though differently expressed. Only I think this latter Way of Expression is more plain, and less liable to Misconstruction, and therefore I chose it.

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But it is indifferent to me how Men *word* Things, so long as we agree in our *Sense*.

II. Having thus given an Account of the *general Rule*, by which a Man is to determine himself in *doubtful Cases*; I come now, in the *second Place*, to treat of the several Heads, or Sorts of *doubtful Cases*, wherein a Man's Conscience is concerned, and to make Application of this *Rule* to them; and this it will be no hard Matter to do, admitting the Grounds we have before laid down.

There is no *Doubt* wherein *Conscience* is concerned, but it will of Necessity fall under one of these two Sorts. It is either a *single Doubt*, or a *double one*.

We call that a *single Doubt*, when a Man doubts only on *one Side* of the Action, but is very well satisfied as to the *other*. As for Instance, he doubts concerning this or the other particular Action, whether it be lawful for him to do it; but on the other Side he hath no Doubt, but is very well assured, that he may lawfully *let it alone*. Or, on the contrary, he is very well satisfied that the Action is lawful, and that he may *do it*; but he doubts whether GOD's Law hath not made it a Duty, so that he cannot lawfully *omit it*. This is that which we call a *single Doubt*.

We call that a *double Doubt*, where a Man doubts on *both Sides* of an Action; that is to say, he doubts on one Side, whether he

he be not bound to *do* this Action; God's Law, for any Thing he knows, made it a *Duty*. But on the other Side, so is the Action circumstantiated with respect to him, or he with respect to it, that he doubts whether he be not bound to *forbear* the Action, as it is now presented to him; God's Law having, for any Thing he knows, *forbid* it. So that he is at a Loss what to do, because he fears he may sin, whether he doth the Action, or doth it not. I say, it will be impossible to put any doubtful Case, wherein a Man's Conscience is concerned, which will not fall under one of these two Heads.

1. Now, as to the Case of a *single Doubt*, we may thus apply the *general Rule*. That when a Man doubts only on *one* Side of an Action, there it is more *reasonable* to chuse that Side of the Action, concerning which he hath no Doubt, than the *other*, concerning which he doubts, supposing all other Considerations be equal.

And here comes in that famous Maxim, which had obtained both among Christians and Heathens, *Quod dubitas ne feceris*; which, with the Restriction I have now mentioned, will for ever be good Advice in all Cases of this Nature.

It must needs be unreasonable to venture upon any Action where a Man hath the least *Fear* or *Suspicion* that it is *possible*, he may transgress some Law of God by it, when it
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is in his Power to act without any *Fear* or *Suspicion* of that Kind; supposing all along, this Consideration of the Possibility of offending by this Action, be not overbalanced, and so the *Fear* of it removed, by other Considerations which the Circumstances of the Action do suggest.

Thus, for Instance: Here is a Man doubts whether it be allowable in a *Christian* to *drink a Health*, or *put out Money to Interest*, or to *go to Law*; as having conversed with such Men, or such Books, as do condemn these Practices, and that not without some Colour from the Word of GOD. The Man is not, indeed, so convinced by their Discourses, as to have taken up any *Opinion* or *Persuasion* that these Practices are unlawful; nor would he censure any Man that uses them, because he sees there are as good Men, and for any Thing he knows, as good *Arguments* for the other Side: But he is not so clear in his Judgment about these Points, as to be able to pronounce any Thing positively concerning them either Way. He cannot say, that he believes them *lawful*, though he is not persuaded that they are *unlawful*, which is the true State of a *doubting* Mind. Now in these, and all other such like Cases, the Rule is plain, that while a Man's Judgment continues thus in Suspence, it is more reasonable for him to forbear these Practices. For there is no Pretence of Obligation upon him

him from God's Law to engage in any of them, and why should he rashly throw himself into Danger, by venturing upon an Action, concerning which he is uncertain whether it be lawful or no? He runs no Hazard by forbearing these Things, but if he practise them he doth.

Thus far is right. But then, as I said this is always to be understood with this Proviso, *Cæteris paribus*. For if there should happen to be such other Considerations in the Action, as have Force enough to overbalance this Consideration of *Uncertainty*; it will then be reasonable to chuse that Side of the Action, concerning which I did before doubt, rather than that, of which I had no Doubt at all.

Thus, if the Man that makes a Question about any of the three Things I before mentioned, should light into such Circumstances, that for Instance, he must either drink such a single *Health*, or a Quarrel is like to ensue; nay, and that perhaps to the Danger of some of the Lives of the Company. Or again, That he has no Means of improving his Money (in which his whole Fortune consists) in any other Way but by that of *Usury*; so that he and his Family must in Time starve, unless they be maintained by this Course. Or lastly, If an Orphan be trusted to his Care, and the Estate of that Orphan is so entangled, that he must be put upon the Necessity either of
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waging a *Law-suit* for the clearing it, or suffering his near Relation, committed to his Charge, to be defrauded of his Right: I say, if the Cases happen to be thus circumstantiated; he that before doubted in general, whether it was lawful to *drink a Health*, or to *put out Money to Usury*, or to *engage in Law-suits*, may, I should think, certainly satisfy himself, that it is not only *lawful*, but *expedient* in this particular Case, notwithstanding his general Doubt to do any of these Things; and if he be a wise Man, he will make no Scruple of acting accordingly.

Indeed he cannot be well excused if he do not thus act: For it will not be sufficient to say, I doubt, whether these Practices are *lawful* or *unlawful*, and therefore I dare not engage in them. Why, Man, if you only *doubt* about them, you do by this acknowledge, that for any Thing you know, they may be *lawful*, as well as that for any Thing you know, they may be *unlawful*. And if you be thus in *Æquilibrio*, sure such pressing Considerations as those which are presented in this Case, ought to turn the Balance. Otherwise I do not know how you will answer, either to yourself, or the World, for the Consequences that may ensue. For my Part, in such Cases as these I should think, that nothing less than a *Belief* or *Persuasion* that the Thing in Question is unlawful, will justify a Man's Prudence in acting on that Side
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which he calls the *Safer*, and which, had not these Circumstances happened, would really have been so.

To conclude; If a great *Good* may be compassed, or a great *Evil* may be avoided, by doing a Thing concerning which we have a *general speculative Doubt* whether it be lawful or no; this very Consideration is in Reason sufficient to silence the Doubt; that is, 'tis enough to persuade us, that it is not only *lawful*, but *adviseable*, to do that in the present Circumstances, which before, and out of those Circumstances, we doubted in general whether it was lawful to be done or no.

II. And thus much concerning the Rule, by which we are to proceed in the Case of a *single Doubt*; I now come to consider that which we call a *double Doubt*, and to shew what is to be done in that Case.

A *double Doubt*, as I have said, is this; when a Man doubts on *both* Sides of an Action; that is to say, He doubts on one Side whether he be not bound to *do* this Action, God's Law having for any Thing he knows, commanded it; but on the other Side, so doth the Action come circumstantiated to him, that he doubts whether he be not by some other Law of God bound to *forbear* it as it is now offered: So that he is at a Loss what to do, because he fears he may sin whether he do the Action, or do it not.

That which is commonly said in this Case, *viz.* That the Man that is entangled, must get his Doubt removed, and then he may with a safe Conscience act, or not act, according as he is satisfied in his own Mind, is, as I said before, very often impertinent; for it is no more in a Man's Power to leave off doubting when he will, than it is in the Power of a *sick Man* to be *well* when he will. And besides, tho' it might be supposed that the Man, with *Time* and good *Counsel*, might be enabled to extricate himself out of this Perplexity; yet in our Case that Benefit is not always allowed; for perhaps the Circumstances of the Case are such, that the Man is under a present Necessity either of acting or not acting; and whether he doth the one, or the other, he doubts he offends God.

But what then is a Man to do in this Case? Why, he is to follow the same *Rule* that he doth in all other *doubtful* Cases, and which we have been all this while insisting on; that is to say, he is to *act as reasonably as he can*: And if he do this, I am sure he incurs no Blame, whether he do the Action he doubts about, or do it not. If there should happen to be any Sin in the Action, it comes upon some other account than that of acting with a *Doubting Conscience*.

But now the Application of this *general Rule* to our present Case is various, according

ing to the Degrees of the Man's *Doubtfulness*, compared with the *Degrees* of the *Sin* he is in Danger of, by acting on the one Side or the other; and likewise according as other Considerations do happen about the Action, which ought to have some Influence in determining the Man. However, I think all those Varieties may be comprised in these *four* following Propositions.

First, If the *Sin* we are afraid of, in doing or not doing the *Action*, doth on both Sides appear *equal*, there we are to determine ourselves to that Side where we have the least Doubt of offending *GOD*; that is to say, to that Side which to our Reason appears *more probable* to be free from the Danger of Sin, rather than that other which is *less probable* to be free from that Danger: For certainly this will always be reasonable, *that a Man should chuse a greater Probability before a less*, supposing all other Things equal.

But, *Secondly*, if we doubt *equally* on both Sides, so that we apprehend that we are in like Danger of transgressing *GOD's* Law, whether we do the Action or do it not: In this Case we are to determine ourselves to that Side, on which it doth appear we shall be guilty of the *least Sin*; for certainly, *by the same Reason for which we are obliged not to sin at all, we shall be obliged*

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ed to chuse a less Sin rather than a greater, where we cannot avoid sinning.

Thirdly, If the *Doubt* be *unequal*, and the *Sin* likewise *unequal*; that is, if it so happen that one Side of the Case is more *probable*, but the other Side *less sinful*, as not involving a Man in so heinous a *Crime* as the other would, if it should prove that he was mistaken: In this Case a Man may chuse either the one Side or the other; according as the Degree of the *Probability*, or the Degree of the *Sin*, compared with one another, do preponderate.

The Case may be such, that there is so much more *Probability* on the one Side than the other; and likewise so inconsiderable a Difference and Disproportion between the *Sins* we are in Danger of on each Side, that a wise Man will be determined to the more *probable* Side, and venture all the Consequences of his Mistakes on the other.

But then, on the other hand, the Case may likewise be such, that the *Consequences* on one Side, if a Man should happen to be mistaken, are so terrible, that they will over-balance all the *Probabilities* on the other Side, let them be never so great (supposing they do not amount to so much Evidence as to create a *Persuasion*, and so put a Man out of the State of *Doubting*) Now here a wise Man will not act on the more
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probable Side, but on that which sets him free from the Danger of these Consequences. Thus, if a Prisoner was tried for a capital Offence, and the Evidence against him doth not appear so full as to create a *Persuasion* in the Judge or Jury that the Man is guilty, tho' indeed it is more *probable* that he is, than that he is not: In this Case, I believe, all Men will say, that, considering there is so great Disproportion between the Evil of condemning an *innocent Person*, and acquitting a *guilty one* (it being Murder in the one Case) the Judge or Jury should rather follow the *safer* Side than the more *probable*; and so *clear* the Man, rather than find him *Guilty*.

Fourthly, If the Case be such, that the Man *doubts equally* on both Sides, and the *Sin* he is afraid of appears likewise to him to be *equal* on both Sides: Here other Considerations are to turn the Balance. In this Case he is to consider what *prudential* Inducements he has to do the Action, or forbear it; as, how far his *Ease* and *Quiet*, his *Advantage* and *Benefit*, his *good Name* and *Reputation*, his *Friends* or his *Family* is concerned one Way or other: And since all other Considerations, that are of a *Moral* Nature, are *equal* on both Sides, those of this Kind, which are the strongest, must add so much Weight to the Scale, as to de-

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termine the Man either to do the Action he doubts about, or to let it alone.

And indeed, it cannot be denied that these Considerations will often have a great Influence, even upon a good Man, not only in the Case I have now put, where the directly moral Arguments are equal on both Sides, but in all the other doubtful Cases I before mentioned.

We may talk very rationally about the *Degrees of Probability*, and the *Degrees of Sin*, and what Weight each of them is to have with us, and all this with so much Evidence, that no Man can deny the Reasonableness of the Rules we lay down in *Thesi*; but yet, when we come to act, we find that scarce any Man doth exactly proceed according to these Rules, but mixes some of these *prudential* Considerations, which I have mentioned, with his Deliberations; and tho' they do not wholly, yet they help to turn the Balance: And, for my Part, I dare not say, that all those who thus proceed, are to be blamed for so doing, supposing that the Case wherein they thus act, be a Case of *pure Doubt*, and there be no *Persuasion* on either Side; and withal, that the Man who thus proceeds, is satisfied in his own Mind with his Proceeding. The Truth is, when all is said, every Man in doubtful Cases is left to his own Discretion; and if he acts according to the best Reason
he

he hath, he is not culpable, tho' he be mistaken in his Measures.

These are all the Rules that are to be given in the Case of a *double Doubt*; and I think no Body can object against the *Truth* of them. But I am sensible of another Objection that may be made, and that is, Why do I mention them at all, since to the Generality of Men, for whom this Discourse is intended, they seem altogether impracticable? For how few are there, who are competent Judges of these different Degrees of *Probability* or *Sinfulness* in an Action that we here talk of, and much less are capable of so balancing these Things one with another, as to be able from thence to form a good Judgment upon the whole Matter?

But to this I answer, That if *Rules* are to be given at all for the determining Men in *doubtful* Cases, we must give these, because we can give no other; these being the only *Principles* that Men have to govern their Actions by in these Cases: And I trust also, they will not be wholly useless to the most ordinary Capacities for the Purposes they are intended; because all may hereby at least learn thus much, *viz.* What Methods they are to proceed by, for the Guidance of their Actions in doubtful Cases: And tho' they may have false Notions of the *Dangers* and the *Degrees* of particular

Sins, and so may sometimes make false Applications of these Rules to their own Case; yet it is enough for their Justification, as I said before, that they have *reasoned* as well as they can; since they are not bound to act in doubtful Cases according to what is *best* and most reasonable in itself; but it is abundantly sufficient that they do endeavour it.

But, to render these Rules about a *double Doubt* more intelligible, and more useful, I think it will not be amiss to give my Reader a *Specimen*, both how they are to be applied to particular Cases, and likewise, when they are applied, what Light they give to a Man for the chusing his Way in any doubtful Case he happens to be engaged in. And since it would take up too much Room to give every particular Rule a several Instance, I shall pitch upon one Case, under which I may consider all the *Varieties* of a *double Doubt* I have now represented; and it shall be that *celebrated* Case of the *Sacrament*; than which, we have not a greater, or a more frequent Instance of this Kind of Doubt in any Case among us. And because I would not, by the Discussion of this Case, divert my Reader (against his Will) from the main Argument, I have taken Care to have it so marked in the Print, that every one may without Trouble (if he have no mind

mind to read it) pass it over as a long Parenthesis, and go on to the next Point.

This is the Case :

“ Here is a Man that believes it to be his
“ Duty to take all Opportunities of receiving the Sacrament, or at least to take them frequently ; but, on the other Side, such is his Condition, that he is constantly under great Fears and Apprehensions of his being unqualified for it: and to receive the Sacrament *unworthily* he knows to be a great *Sin* : Not that there is any grievous notorious Sin lies upon his Conscience unrepented of ; much less that he is engaged in some vicious Course, which he is unwilling that his new Vows at his Approach to the LORD’s Table, should divorce him from ; for indeed he desires and endeavours *in all Things to live honestly, and to keep a Conscience void of Offence towards GOD, and towards Man.*

“ But this is the Case : He is not so devout a Christian, nor lives so pure and spiritual a Life, as he thinks becomes the Partakers of such heavenly Food. Or, perhaps he cannot bring himself to so feeling a Sense and Contrition for his past Sins, or such Ardours of Love and Devotion to our Saviour, as he hath been taught that every worthy Communicant ought to be affected with. Or perhaps he wants Faith
“ in

“ in the Blood of *Christ*, not being able to
 “ apply the Benefits of his Passion so com-
 “ fortably to his own Heart as he thinks he
 “ ought to do. Or perhaps, in the last
 “ Place, his Mind is so haunted with a
 “ Company of idle and naughty Fancies,
 “ especially when he sets himself to be more
 “ than ordinarily serious, that he thinks it
 “ would be a great Profanation of the Sa-
 “ crament for him to come to it in such Cir-
 “ cumstances.

“ These, or such like, are the Things
 “ that trouble him: And tho’ he hath sever-
 “ al Times endeavoured to put himself in-
 “ to a better Condition, yet he could never
 “ satisfy himself, nor get over these Diffi-
 “ culties. What now must this Man do?
 “ He would fain receive the Sacrament, as
 “ thinking himself bound to do it; but he
 “ dare not receive it, as looking upon him-
 “ self to be unqualified for it: If he do not
 “ come to the LORD’S Table, he denies his
 “ Attendance on the most solemn Ordinance
 “ of Christianity, and so doubts he sins on
 “ that Account; if he do come, he doubts
 “ he approaches unworthily, and so sins upon
 “ that account.

“ It is here to be remembered, that the
 “ Question to be spoken to in this Case is
 “ not this: What Course the Man is to take
 “ for the curing or removing his Doubtful-

“ ness

“ness in this Matter, that so he may come
“to the Sacrament with Satisfaction to his
“own Mind; but this: Supposing the Man,
“after all his Endeavours, cannot cure or
“remove his Doubt, what he must do?
“Must he come to the Sacrament, or must
“he forbear? One of them he must do,
“and yet, which of them soever he chuseth,
“he fears he sins.

“If the former had been the Question,
“the Resolution of it would have been thus:
“That the Man is to use the best Means he
“can to get better Instruction and Informa-
“tion about the *Nature* and *Ends* of the
“Christian Sacrament, and about the *Qualities* and *Dispositions* that are needful to
“fit a Man for it, particularly those of *Faith*
“and *Repentance*; for it is the Man’s Ignorance or Mistake about these Things, that
“makes him pass so hard a Censure upon
“himself, and so occasions all the Doubtfulness in this Case. If he once come rightly to understand these Points, his Doubts
“would of themselves fall to the Ground;
“and the Man would be perfectly satisfied,
“that as his Case is (supposing it to be such
“as I have now represented) he may, without any Fear or Scruple in the World, at
“any Time approach to the Holy Table;
“because he is indeed in such a State and
“Disposition of Mind as renders him *habitually*

“ *bitually* qualified for the Performance of
 “ that Duty.

“ But this, as I said, is not the Question
 “ before us : We here suppose the Man, ei-
 “ ther thro’ Want of *Means* of *Instruction*,
 “ or thro’ strong *Prejudices* from *Educati-*
 “ *on*, or the like, to be incapable at present
 “ of this Satisfaction, and to be in great Per-
 “ plexity on both Sides; and that which we
 “ are to enquire into, is, to which Side of the
 “ doubtful Case he must determine himself.
 “ Shall he *receive* the Sacrament doubting
 “ as he doth? or, shall he *forbear* it doubt-
 “ ing as he doth?

“ Now, I say, a Man hath no other way
 “ of coming to a Resolution of this Questi-
 “ on, but by applying the Rules I before laid
 “ down to his present Case; which may be
 “ done in this manner:

“ Since the Man we speak of, doubteth
 “ that he fins whether he come to the Sa-
 “ crament, or forbear; the *first* Thing to be
 “ considered is, on which Side he doubts
 “ *least*; or which Side appears to him most
 “ likely and probable to be free from the
 “ Danger of sinning : For, *if all other*
 “ *Things in the Case be equal, the Balance*
 “ *is to be turned on that Side*, according to
 “ our *first* Proposition.

“ Now, if our present Question be put
 “ upon this Issue, I am confident the Man,
 “ whose Case I am representing, will think
 “ it

“it more reasonable to repair to the Sacra-
 “ment, even in that evil Posture he takes
 “himself to be, than customarily to abstain
 “from it; because by thus doing he doth
 “certainly follow the more *probable*, and
 “less *doubtful* or *dangerous* Side of the
 “Question: For it is evident, he cannot
 “pretend to be half so certain of this *Parti-*
 “*cular*, viz. That he is *unprepared* for the
 “Sacrament, which is the Reason of his ab-
 “staining, as he is certain in the *general*,
 “that it is his *Duty* to frequent it.

“If indeed the Man was a Person of ill
 “Life and Manners: Or if he had been late-
 “ly guilty of any notorious wilful Sin, and
 “came to the LORD’s Table with that Sin
 “upon his Conscience unrepented of; then
 “I will grant he had some Reason to believe,
 “that he was as much in Danger of sinning
 “by receiving unworthily, as by withdraw-
 “ing himself from God’s Ordinance. But
 “the Case here is not so: The Man is really
 “an honest well-meaning *Christian*; nor
 “hath he done any Thing of late, which
 “can give him any Suspicion of his having
 “forfeited that Title: Only thro’ his Mis-
 “take about the Notion of Preparation for
 “the Sacrament, he apprehends, he is not
 “qualified as he ought to be; tho’ yet, if
 “most others were to be Judges of his Con-
 “dition, they would say, he was. Why,
 “cer-

“ certainly in this Case it must be evident
 “ to the Man, that he runs a greater Danger
 “ of transgressing the Law of God, by ab-
 “ senting himself from the Communion,
 “ especially if he do it customarily, than if
 “ he should come to it with all his *Fears*
 “ and *Doubts* about him; for, as I said, his
 “ *Fears* and *Doubts* of his own Unworthi-
 “ ness cannot possibly be so well grounded,
 “ as his *Fears* and *Doubts* that he sins against
 “ God by habitually denying his Attendance
 “ on that great Christian Service; for those
 “ are founded on the express Laws of the
 “ Gospel; the others are founded only on
 “ uncertain conjectural Surmises about his
 “ own Condition: That is to say, he is cer-
 “ tain that he is bound to take frequent Op-
 “ portunities of paying his Homage to *Jesus*
 “ *Christ* in the Sacrament, but he cannot
 “ pretend to have such Assurance in his Case,
 “ that he is unqualified for paying that Ho-
 “ mage.

“ But, secondly, let us suppose the *Doubt*
 “ is *equal* on both sides; that is to say, that
 “ the Man hath as much Reason to believe
 “ that he is an *unworthy Receiver*, if he re-
 “ ceives at all, as he hath Reason to believe
 “ that it is a *Sin* in him if he do not receive;
 “ which yet can hardly be supposed in our
 “ Case: But let us suppose it; nay, if you
 “ please, let us suppose the Man doth cer-
 “ tainly sin, whether he *receives* or *forbears*:

“ Here

“Here then this comes to be considered,
 “which of these two *Sins* is the least; to
 “*receive unworthily*, yet out of a Sense of
 “Duty, or *not to receive at all*: For on
 “which Side soever this last Sin happens to
 “be, to that Side the Man is to determine
 “himself, according to our second Rule;
 “it being eternally reasonable, that of *two*
 “*Evils we should chuse the least, when we*
 “*cannot avoid both.*

“Now putting the Case before us upon
 “this Issue, there needs no more to be done
 “for the resolving it, than only to ask this
 “general Question:

“Which is the *greater Sin* of these two,
 “for a Man to omit a *known Duty*, and so
 “to break a *known Law* of God for *Consci-*
 “*ence* sake; or to yield *Obedience* to that
 “*Law* for *Conscience* sake, when yet it so
 “happens, that a Man cannot do that, with-
 “out breaking another *Law* of God in the
 “*manner* of his Performance of that *Duty*?
 “For my Part, I should think, that the
 “Man who doth this last, tho’ he cannot
 “be said to be innocent, yet he is guilty in a
 “far *less degree* than the Man that practiseth
 “the former; and a great Deal more is to
 “be said in his Justification.

“Let us suppose two Men, both of them
 “conscious to themselves, that, as Things
 “stand with them, they are not in a fit Con-
 “dition so much as to *say* their *Prayers*, or
 “to

“ to perform any other Act of religious Wor-
 “ ship as they ought to do: Now one of
 “ these Men doth upon this account forbear
 “ all *Prayers*, both *publick* and *private*, nei-
 “ ther using his *Closet*, nor frequenting the
 “ *Church*: The other hath such a Sense of
 “ what both Natural Religion and Christia-
 “ nity do oblige him to in this matter, that
 “ he dares not forbear his usual Offices, ei-
 “ ther *publick* or *private*, tho’ yet he be-
 “ lieves he finfully performs them.

“ If the Question now be put, which of
 “ these two is the better Man, or the least Of-
 “ fender; I dare say that all Men will give
 “ their Judgment in favour of the latter, tho’
 “ yet no wise Man will think that this Person
 “ is to be excused for living at such a rate,
 “ that he cannot *say his Prayers* without Sin.

“ This Judgment, I say, Men would
 “ pass in this Case; and there is a great deal
 “ of Reason for it; for certainly no Indispo-
 “ sition that a Man hath contracted, of what
 “ nature soever, will take off from his Obli-
 “ gation to obey the Laws of God.

“ If a Man cannot do his Duty so well as
 “ he ought, he must at least do it as well as
 “ he can: And therefore, let his Circum-
 “ stances be what they will, he must needs be
 “ less *criminal* in performing a known Duty
 “ in the best *manner* that his Condition will
 “ allow him, tho’ with many and deserved
 “ Reflections upon his own *Unworthiness*,
 “ than

“ than in wholly *omitting* or *disusing* that
 “ Duty: Because a neglect in the *Manner* of
 “ performing a Duty, is a less Fault than to
 “ neglect the *Substance* of it.

“ Let this now that I have said be applied
 “ to our Case, and we have an easy Resoluti-
 “ on of the Question before us, *viz.* That
 “ since a *greater Sin* is to be avoided before
 “ a *less*, when a Man supposes himself to be
 “ under a Necessity of being guilty of *one*, it
 “ is more reasonable that the Man we speak
 “ of should come to the *Sacrament* with all
 “ his Doubts concerning his Unworthiness,
 “ than that he should customarily and ha-
 “ bitually withdraw himself from it, be-
 “ cause it is a greater Sin to do this latter
 “ than the former.

“ Well; but some say, How can this
 “ consist with St. Paul's Doctrine, who ex-
 “ pressly affirms, That *whoever eateth and* ^{1 Cor. xi.}
 “ *drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh* 29.
 “ *Damnation to himself?* Can there be
 “ any more dreadful Sin than that, which if
 “ a Man be guilty of, it will actually *damn*
 “ him? Certainly one would think by this,
 “ that a Man runs a much less Hazard in
 “ not receiving at all, than in venturing to
 “ receive, whilst he hath the least Doubt that
 “ he receives unworthily, considering the
 “ dreadful Consequences of it.

“ But to this I briefly answer: Such
 “ a Man as we all along suppose in our
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“ Case, is in no Danger at all of *receiving*
 “ *unworthily*, in the Sense that St. Paul
 “ useth this Term: For the *unworthy re-*
 “ *ceiving* that he so severely censures in the
 “ *Corinthians*, was their approaching to the
 “ LORD’S Table with so little a Sense of
 “ what they were about, that they made no
 “ *distinction* between the LORD’S *Body* and
 1 Cor. xi. “ *common Food*; but under a Pretence of
 29. “ meeting for the Celebration of the LORD’S
 Ver. 20, “ *Supper*, they used the *Church* of God as
 21, 22. “ if it was an *Eating* or *Tippling* House;
 “ some of them revelling it there to that de-
 “ gree, that they went away *drunk* from
 “ these religious Assemblies. All this ap-
 “ pears from the Text. But I hope none
 “ among us (especially none of those who
 “ are so doubtful about their being duly qua-
 “ lified) do *profane* the Sacrament in this
 “ manner.

“ But farther: Perhaps the *Damnation*
 “ which St. Paul here denounces, is not so
 “ frightful as is commonly apprehended;
 “ for all that he saith (if either the Original
 “ or the margin of our English Bibles be
 “ consulted) will appear to be this, *He that*
 “ *eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and*
 “ *drinketh Judgment to himself*. Meaning
 “ hereby, in all Probability, that he who
 “ doth thus affront our LORD’S Institution,
 “ by making no Distinction between the
 “ Bread of the Sacrament and common
 “ meat,

“ meat, doth by this his Profaneness draw severe Judgments of GOD upon himself :
 “ For, *for this Cause* (saith he) *many are* Ver. 30]
 “ *weak and sickly among you, and many are*
 “ *fallen asleep* : But here is not a Word of
 “ *everlasting Damnation*, much less of any
 “ Man’s being put into that State by thus
 “ *receiving unworthily* : Unless any Man will
 “ say, that all those who are visited with
 “ GOD’s Judgments in this World, are in the
 “ State of Damnation as to the next : Which
 “ is so far from being true, that St. Paul,
 “ in this very Place affirms the contrary, viz.
 “ in the 32^d Verse, where he tells us, That
 “ *when we are thus judged* [in this World]
 “ *we are chastened of the LORD, that we*
 “ *should not be condemned with the World,*
 “ *i. e.* with wicked Men in another Life.

“ But farther. Admitting St. Paul in
 “ these Words to mean *Damnation* in the
 “ usual Sense, yet still the utmost they can
 “ come to, will be no more than this ; That
 “ *whosoever eateth and drinketh thus un-*
 “ *worthily, as the Corinthians did, is guilty*
 “ *of a damnable Sin.* But now there are a
 “ great many other Cases, besides this of the
 “ Sacrament, in which a Man is equally
 “ guilty of a *damnable Sin*, if he do not per-
 “ form his Duty as he ought to do : He that
 “ *prays or hears unworthily* ; he that *fasts*
 “ or gives *Alms unworthily* ; in a Word, he
 “ that in any Instance performs the Worship

“ of God, or professeth the Christian Reli-
 “ gion unworthily; I say, such a Man, ac-
 “ cording to the Protestant Doctrine, may
 “ be said to do these Things *to his own Dam-*
 “ *nation*, upon the same Account that he is
 “ said to *eat and drink* his own *Damnation*,
 “ that communicates unworthily in the Sa-
 “ crament, tho’ indeed not in so high a de-
 “ gree: That is to say, Such a Man is
 “ guilty of a Sin that is in its own Nature
 “ *damnable*, and may prove actually so to
 “ him, unless either by a particular or ge-
 “ neral Repentance he obtains God’s Par-
 “ don for it. But yet, for all this, there is
 “ no Man will for these Reasons think it
 “ adviseable to leave off the Practice of these
 “ Duties; but the only Consequence he will
 “ draw from hence is, that he is so much
 “ the more concerned to take Care that he
 “ perform them as he ought to do.

“ But, in the *last* Place, let the Sin of
 “ coming to the Sacrament unworthily be
 “ as great and as damnable as we reasonably
 “ can suppose it, yet this is that we contend
 “ for, the Sin of totally withdrawing from
 “ it, is much greater, and more damnable:
 “ So that if he who partakes of it *unworthi-*
 “ *ly*, doth *eat and drink Damnation to him-*
 “ *self*; he that partakes not at all, is so far
 “ from mending the matter, that he doth
 “ much increase that Damnation.

“ The Truth of this doth fully appear
 “ from what I have before spoke in general, concerning the much greater Sin of
 “ transgressing a known Law of God, than
 “ of observing that Law as well as we can,
 “ tho’ with much Unworthiness. I will only
 “ add this farther, with Reference to this
 “ Particular of receiving the Sacrament.

“ Tho’ I am far from encouraging any to
 “ approach to the LORD’s Table without due
 “ Qualifications; or from extenuating any
 “ Man’s Sin that comes unworthily (unworthily I mean in the Scripture Sense of that
 “ Word, and not as it is understood by many melancholy scrupulous Persons) yet this
 “ I say, That if Men did seriously consider
 “ what a Sin it is to live without the Sacrament, it being no other than living in an
 “ open Affront to the express *Institution* of
 “ our LORD JESUS, and a renouncing the
 “ *Worship* of God and the *Communion* of
 “ the Church, in the great Instance of Christian Worship and Christian Communion;
 “ and withal, the dreadful Consequences they
 “ bring upon themselves hereby, even the
 “ depriving themselves of the chief of those
 “ ordinary Means, which our LORD hath appointed for the obtaining *Remission* of Sins,
 “ and the *Grace* and *Influence* of his *Holy Spirit*: I say, if Men did seriously consider these Things, they would not look
 “ upon it as so slight a Matter, voluntarily to

“ excommunicate themselves as to the par-
 “ taking in this great Duty and Privilege of
 “ *Christians*; but what Apprehensions so-
 “ ever they had of the Sin, and the Danger
 “ of receiving unworthily, they would, for
 “ all that, think it more *sinful* and more
 “ *dangerous* not to receive at all.

“ I have said enough in answer to this
 “ Objection from *St. Paul*; perhaps too
 “ much, considering how often these Things
 “ have been said: I will now go on with our
 “ Case.

“ In the *third* Place therefore, let us sup-
 “ pose our doubting Man (for these or such
 “ like Reasons as we have given) to have
 “ such a Sense of his Duty, that he general-
 “ ly takes the Opportunities that are offered
 “ him of doing Honour to our LORD by par-
 “ taking in his Supper, tho’ perhaps he is
 “ not often very well satisfied about his Pre-
 “ paration: But so it happens, that, since his
 “ last communicating, he finds his Mind in
 “ a much worse Frame than it used to be:
 “ He hath lived more loosely and carelessly
 “ than he was wont; or perhaps he hath
 “ been very lately guilty of some grievous
 “ Sin that lies heavy upon his Conscience;
 “ so that when his next usual Time of re-
 “ ceiving comes, he cannot but apprehend
 “ himself in a very unfit Condition to com-
 “ municate in so sacred a Mystery. Upon
 “ this he is in a great Perplexity what to do:
 “ For

“ For on the one side he thinks he hath more
“ Reason to believe that he offends God, if
“ he comes to the Sacrament in these Cir-
“ cumstances, than if he forbears; because
“ he is more certain that there is a Law of
“ God that forbids him to come *unworthi-*
“ *ly*, than he is certain that there is a Law
“ of God that commands him to *receive*
“ *every Time* that he hath Opportunity. But
“ now, on the other Hand, if it should prove
“ that he is really bound by God’s Law to
“ commemorate the Death of *Christ* in the
“ Sacrament every Time that an Opportu-
“ nity is offered, he is sensible, in that Case,
“ it is a greater Sin to neglect this Duty than
“ to perform it unworthily, so long still as
“ he performs it out of Conscience. What
“ now is the Man to do in these Circum-
“ stances?

“ This is an exact Instance of the Case I
“ spoke to in my *third* Proposition, where
“ on one Side the Man runs a greater *Dan-*
“ *ger* of sinning; but on the other Side, if
“ he should prove mistaken, he sins in a
“ greater *Degree*.

“ Now, for a Resolution of this Case I
“ say, That if the Question be put con-
“ cerning the Man’s absenting himself only
“ *once* or *twice* from the Communion, in
“ order to the Exercise of Repentance, and
“ the putting himself into a better Frame of
“ Mind against another Opportunity; the

“ Answer according to our *third* Propositi-
 “ on must be this, that it is very reasonable
 “ thus to do.

“ And there is good Ground for this An-
 “ swer; for certainly a Man is more in
 “ Danger of sinning if he receive unworthi-
 “ ly, than if he do not receive every Time
 “ that there is a Communion; there being
 “ an exprefs Law against the one, but no ex-
 “ prefs Law obliging to the other: For
 “ *Christ* hath no more appointed that we
 “ should *receive* the Sacrament so many
 “ Times in a *Year*, than he hath appointed
 “ that we should *pray* so many Times in a
 “ *Day*; or, that we should give such a de-
 “ terminate Proportion of our annual In-
 “ come to Charitable Uses. As to these
 “ Things, he hath bound us in the *General*;
 “ but as to the *Particulars*, the Circum-
 “ stances of our Condition, and the Laws
 “ of our Superiors, are to determine us:
 “ Only this we are to remember, that the
 “ oftener we perform these Duties it is the
 “ better; and we can hardly be said to be
 “ *Christians*, if we do not perform them
 “ frequently.

“ This now being so; tho’ it be true, that
 “ a Man would be guilty of a greater Sin if
 “ he should at any Time, tho’ but once,
 “ abstain from the Communion, than if he
 “ should come to it with such *Unworthiness*
 “ as we are here speaking of; supposing that
 “ *Christ’s*

“ *Christ*’s Law had precisely tied him up to
 “ communicate every Time that a Commu-
 “ nion is appointed; yet since there is so
 “ little Appearance of Reason to conclude
 “ that *Christ* has thus tied him up; and
 “ withal, on the other Hand, he runs so cer-
 “ tain a danger of sinning, if he should com-
 “ municate at this Time, apprehending him-
 “ self to be so *unworthy* as he doth: This
 “ Consideration of the *certain danger* must
 “ needs, in this Case, over-balance the other
 “ of the *greater Sin*, and make it appear
 “ more reasonable to the Man to suspend
 “ his receiving to another Opportunity, a-
 “ gainst which Time he hopes to be better
 “ prepared, than to adventure upon it in
 “ his present Circumstances.

“ But then, if the Question be put con-
 “ cerning the Man’s absenting himself *cu-*
 “ *stomarily* and *habitually* from the LORD’s
 “ Table upon this account of *Unworthiness*,
 “ that which I have now said, will not hold;
 “ for, in this Case, the Man is in as much
 “ danger of sinning by not *receiving at all*,
 “ as by *receiving unworthily*; nay, and a
 “ great deal more, as I shewed in my *first*
 “ Particular about this Case: And withal,
 “ he is guilty of a much *greater Sin* in whol-
 “ ly withdrawing from the Sacrament, than
 “ in coming to it, tho’ with never so great
 “ Apprehensions of his own Unworthiness;
 “ as I shewed in my *second*. And there-
 “ fore,

“ fore, since the *danger* is at least *equal* on
 “ both Sides, he must chuse that Side, on
 “ which the *least Sin* lies: That is to say,
 “ he must communicate frequently (at least
 “ so often as the Laws of the *Church* do en-
 “ join him, which is *three Times a Year*)
 “ tho’ he be in Danger of doing it unworthi-
 “ ly, rather than not communicate at all.

“ Having thus gone thro’ *three* of our Pro-
 “ positions concerning a *double Doubt*; all
 “ that remains is, to put our Case about the
 “ Sacrament so, as that it may serve for an
 “ Instance or Illustration of our *fourth* and
 “ last.

“ Here therefore we are to suppose our
 “ Doubting Man to be in such a Condition,
 “ that he apprehends he runs an *equal dan-*
 “ *ger of sinning*, whether he receives the
 “ Sacrament, or receives it not. And withal
 “ so unskilful a Judge is he of the Morality
 “ of Actions, that he apprehends no great
 “ Difference in the Degree of the Sin, whe-
 “ ther he do the one or the other.

“ In this Case now all the Man can do, is,
 “ to consider what Inducements he has, in
 “ Point of *Prudence* or *Interest*, to do or to
 “ forbear the Action he doubts about; for
 “ since all other Considerations in the Case
 “ are *equal*, those of this Kind are to turn
 “ the Balance, according to our *fourth* Pro-
 “ position.

“ But

“ But if the Case turn upon this Point, I
 “ dare say no Man will be long doubtful,
 “ whether he should frequent the Sacrament
 “ in Obedience to the Laws, or forbear it;
 “ for it is plain, that he acts more *prudently*,
 “ and more consults his own *Advantage*, both
 “ *temporal* and *spiritual*, by doing the former.
 “ As for the *temporal* Advantages which
 “ a Man receives by obeying the Laws in
 “ this Matter, I will not now insist on them,
 “ tho’ they are neither few nor inconsider-
 “ able: That which I desire chiefly to be
 “ here considered, is this; That in Point of
 “ *spiritual Advantages* it is much more ad-
 “ viseable for our Doubting Person to come
 “ to the Sacrament, than to abstain from it:
 “ For, by frequenting this Ordinance, he
 “ takes the best Method, both to grow more
 “ *worthy*, if he be now *unworthy*, and like-
 “ wise to cure the *Doubts* and *Scruples* he is
 “ now troubled with. But if he neglect this
 “ means of Grace, he not only takes an ef-
 “ fectual Course to increase and perpetuate
 “ his *Fears* and *Doubts* (it being very pro-
 “ bable that the longer he defers his receiving
 “ the Sacrament, still the more *doubtful* will
 “ he be of his being qualified for it) but also
 “ is in great Danger to lose that Sense of
 “ Virtue and Religion that he now hath upon
 “ his Spirit, because he denies himself the Use
 “ of those Means and Helps which are most
 “ principally necessary for the preserving and
 “ maintaining it.

“ Now,

“ Now, I say, supposing all other Things
 “ in the Case *equal*, this very Consideration
 “ alone will prevail with a reasonable Man
 “ to *come* to the Sacrament, rather than *for-*
 “ *bear* it; even at the same Time that he
 “ mightily *doubts* whether he shall not re-
 “ ceive unworthily.

“ Thus have I given a large Exemplifica-
 “ tion of all our Rules concerning a *double*
 “ *Doubt*, in this Instance of *receiving the*
 “ *Holy Communion*. If I have dwelt too
 “ long upon this Subject, I hope the Fre-
 “ quency and the Importance of the Case
 “ will in some measure excuse me.

III. Having thus prepared our Way, by settling the *Notion* and the *Rule* of a *doubting* Conscience, I come now more directly to the main Business that is before us, and that is, to give an Account *what Share human Laws, Ecclesiastical or Civil, have in the Rule of a doubting Conscience; or what Power they have to over-rule a Man's Doubts in any Case*: Which, according to the method I proposed, is the *third* general Enquiry I am to resolve.

This is indeed the great Point that is disputed between *us* and those of the *Separation*: Nay, I may say, it is the Point, upon which that whole Controversy turns, so far as a *doubting* Conscience is concerned in it; and therefore I shall discuss it as carefully as
 I can,

I can, but yet in such a general Way, as that what I have to offer may serve for all other doubtful Cases of this Nature, as well as this which we are now concerned in.

Their Assertion *generally* is this (*generally*, I say; for there are some of the Dissenters, and those as learned and eminent as any, who have declared themselves of another Opinion) *viz.* That wherever a Man doubts concerning the Lawfulness of an Action, that very *Doubt* of his is a sufficient Reason to make him *forbear* that Action, tho' lawful Authority hath commanded it.

On the other Side our Assertion is, That wherever lawful Authority hath commanded an Action, that *Command* is (generally speaking) a sufficient Warrant for a Man to do that Action, though he *doubts* whether in itself it be lawful or no.

That I may speak clearly to this Point, I shall *first* premise some Things, in order to our more distinct understanding the State of the Question. *Secondly*, I shall shew the Grounds and Reasons of our Assertion. *Thirdly*, I shall endeavour to answer the chief Arguments that are brought on the other Side.

1. What I think needful to be premised for the right apprehending the State of the Question, I shall comprize in these following Particulars; by which it may be easily discerned how far we agree with the Dissenters

ers in this Matter, and in what we differ from them.

First, We do readily own with them, that no Authority upon Earth can oblige its Subjects to *do* any Action which the Law of God hath forbidden, or to *forbear* any Action which the Law of God hath commanded.

Secondly, We agree likewise with them in this ; that wherever any Subject hath taken up an *Opinion* or *Persuasion* that such an Action which his Governors have obliged him to, is against the Law of God ; tho' it be a *false* Opinion or Persuasion, yet it will so far bind him, that he cannot in that Instance obey their Laws without offending God. But then we say, on the other hand, that tho' he cannot *obey* without Sin, so long as this *Persuasion* continues, yet he is at the same Time guilty of Sin in *disobeying*, if he should prove to be *mistaken*, supposing that it was thro' his own Fault that he fell into that *Mistake*.

Thirdly, We acknowledge farther, that in a Case where a Man cannot be said to be persuaded, that the particular Action enjoined by Authority is a sinful Action, but only he *doubts* whether it be so or no ; yet if the Man hath a general *Persuasion* that no *publick Law* will warrant him to act against his *private Doubts* ; in this Case he can no more do the Action enjoined without Sin, than he could in the former Case. But then,
if

if this Notion of his be false (as it is my present Business to shew that it is so) he cannot be excused from Sin in *disobeying* his Superiors, unless upon the former Account of *inculpable Ignorance*.

Fourthly, We say this farther, That a *culpable Doubt* doth no more excuse the doing an *evil* Action, than a *culpable Ignorance*; *i. e.* it doth not excuse it. My meaning is this: If a Man should be so little instructed in his Religion, as to *doubt* whether that which is *plainly enjoined* by God's Law be a *Duty* or no: or, Whether that which is *plainly forbid* by God's Law be a *Sin* or no (so plainly, I mean, that it is the Duty of every honest Man to know this, and he must be most criminally *ignorant*, that can be so *stupid* as to make a *Doubt* of it) if, I say, in such a Case as this, a Man should *doubt* whether the Thing commanded by his Superiors was *lawful* or no; we are so far from saying, that a Man doth well in obeying his Superiors, in such an Instance where their Commands do so manifestly contradict the Laws of God, that on the contrary we affirm, the Man is highly accountable to God for all such Actions that he doth, tho' they were done purely in Obedience to that Authority which God hath set over him; and purely in Compliance with this Principle we are now contending for, *viz.* That in all doubtful Cases, it is
most

most reasonable to govern our Actions by the Commands of our Superiors.

Far are we therefore from asserting, That whatever our Governors do command, the Subject is bound to perform, so long as he only *doubts*, but is not *persuaded* of the Unlawfulness of the Thing commanded; and that, if there be any Sin in the Action, he that *commands* it, is to answer for it, and not he that *obeys*: For we do believe, that in Matters where a Man's *Conscience* is concerned, every one is to be a *Judge* for himself, and must *answer* for himself. And therefore, if our Superiors do command us to do an Action which *their Superior*, God Almighty, hath forbid; we are Offenders if we do that Action, as well as they in commanding it, and that whether we do it *doubtfully*, or with a *Persuasion* of its Lawfulness.

But then these *two* Things are always to be remembered; *first*, That this is true only in such Cases where (as I said) a Man is bound to know that God's Law hath forbid that Action which his Governors do command, and it is either thro' his gross Carelessness, or some other worse Principle in him, that he knows it not, or is doubtful of it. For wherever a Man is innocently and inculpably *ignorant* or *doubtful*, how the Law of God stands as to such a particular
Matter,

Matter which Authority hath obliged him to; as having neither means to come to the Knowledge of it; or if he had, the Circumstances of his Condition not requiring that he should so accurately inform himself about it: In such a Case as this, I say, a Man cannot *formally* be said to be guilty of *Sin* in obeying his lawful Superiors, though the Instance in which he obeys, should happen to contradict some Law of God. For the *Law* of God here is as no *Law* to him, that is, it doth not oblige him, because he neither knows it, nor is bound to know it. And *where there is no Law, there is no Transgression.*

And then, farther, this is also to be remembered, that when we own that a Man may be guilty of Sin, as well in obeying his Superior, when he only *doubts* of the Lawfulness of the Action commanded, as when he is *persuaded* that the Action is unlawful: I say, this we are to remember, that whenever this Case happens, the Man's Sin doth not lie in his *obeying* his Superiors with a *doubting* Conscience (which is commonly run away with;) for the Man would as certainly sin, if in this Case he did the Action with a *Persuasion* that it was lawful; as he doth in doing it with a *Doubt*, whether it be lawful or no: But the Sin lies here, *viz.* in doing an Action which God's Law hath forbid; and which the Man would

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have known to be an ill Action, if he had been so honest, and so careful in minding his Duty as he should have been. It is his acting contrary to a Law of God, that here makes the *matter* of the Sin; and it is his vicious criminal Ignorance of that Law which gives the *Form* to it. But as for the obeying his Superiors, whether with a *Doubt* or without one, that is no Part or Ingredient of the Sin at all.

Fifthly, We add this farther, That whatever Power or Right we give to our Superiors, for the over-ruling a *private Doubt*; it is not to be extended so far as either to destroy the *Truth*, or to supersede the *Use* of those *Rules* I have before laid down in order to the directing a Man's proceeding in the Case of a *double Doubt*. For this Case of *obeying the Commands of our Superiors*, when we doubt of the Lawfulness of them, being a *double Doubt* as properly as any other, those *Rules* are here to take place as much as in any other Instance.

And therefore wherever a Man's *Doubts* are in this Case very *unequal*: That is to say, he apprehends himself in much greater *danger* of sinning if he *obey* his Superiors in this particular Instance, than if he *obey* them not; as having abundantly more Reason to believe that their Commands are unlawful, than that they are lawful: In that Case we
cannot

cannot say, he is obliged to *obey*, but should rather *disobey*, supposing all other Considerations to be equal: For no Man is bound to *obey* his Superiors any farther than they command *lawful* Things. And therefore if it be two to one more *probable* that their Command is *unlawful* than that it is *lawful*, it is likewise more *probable* that a Man in this Instance is not to *obey* them. And a *greater Probability*, cæteris paribus, is *always to be chosen before a less*, according to our *first Rule*.

But then, though the Authority of our Superiors alone will not in this Case be of Force enough to retrieve the Balance which is so far inclined the other Way, and to turn it on its own side; yet there may be, and very usually are, such other Arguments drawn from the Consideration of the *greater Sin*, and the more *dreadful Consequences*, of *disobeying* in this Instance, than of *obeying*; as will to any reasonable Man outweigh all the *Probabilities* on the other side (so long as they are not so great as to create a Persuasion) and make it reasonable for the Man rather to do the Action, how strong soever his Doubts be of the Unlawfulness of it (so long as they are but *Doubts*) than to *omit* it after lawful Authority hath enjoined it.

But however this happen; it is always to be born in mind, as before, that if it should

prove that our Superiors do command nothing in the particular Instances, but what they *lawfully* may do; it will not justify any Man's *disobedience*, to say, that he apprehended it was more *dangerous* or more *sinful* to *obey* them, than to *disobey* them: For our *Mistakes* and *false Reasonings*, will not take off from the Obligation that is upon us to obey our lawful Superiors in their lawful Commands; unless, as I have often said, we can satisfy ourselves, that in those Instances we neither were bound, nor had sufficient means to understand better.

And now having thus cleared our Way, by removing from our *Question* those things that are *foreign* to it, and which indeed, by being usually blended with it, have made it more intricate than otherwise it would be, we are pretty well prepared to propose our Point.

In the *sixth* Place then, Excluding (as we have done) out of our Case all those Things and Circumstances we have been speaking of, with none of which we have here to do; the plain Question before us is this:

Whether in the Case of a pure *Doubt* about the *Lawfulness* or *Unlawfulness* of an Action, where the *Probabilities* are on both sides pretty *equal*, and where likewise the Man concerned hath done all that he was obliged to do for the satisfying himself:

Whether,

Whether, I say, in this Case the Command of a lawful Superior ought not so far to over-balance the *Doubt*, as not only to make it reasonable for the Man to do that, of which he doubteth; but also to oblige him so to do.

We hold the *Affirmative* of this Question; and I now come to give the Reasons why we so hold, which is the second Thing to be done under this Head.

2. Our Proposition is this, That if lawful Authority do command us to do a thing, which as on the one hand we cannot say it is *lawful*; so on the other hand, we cannot say it is *unlawful*; but our Judgment remains suspended, as having equal, or near equal Arguments on both Sides: In such a Case as this, though if we were left to our own Choice, we should generally forbear the Action for the Reasons I before gave; yet being commanded by our Superiors, who by the Law of GOD have Authority over us; it is not only *reasonable*, but our *Duty* to do it.

For *first* of all, even in Point of *Humility* and *Modesty*, though there was no other Consideration; one would think that a Subject owes as much Deference to the Judgment and Discretion of his Superiors as this comes to.

So much Influence as this, even a *Confessor* or a *private Friend* hath over our

Consciences. In a Case where we are altogether uncertain on both Sides, we usually so far submit ourselves to them, as to be swayed and over-ruled by what they advise; and that oftentimes not so much upon Consideration of the Weight and Force of their Reasons, as meerly upon this Account, that we take them to be abler to guide us in these Affairs than we ourselves are, as having better considered them, and seeing farther into them than we do.

I dare say there are few of those we are now disputing with, if a Doubt should happen to arise in their Conscience about the Lawfulness of any Practice in their *Trade*, or their other Civil Concernments, and they should upon this apply to some Friend of theirs, of whose *Learning* and *Prudence* and *Honesty* they have a good Opinion, and put their Case to him; but would (if the *Doubt* was so *equal* on both Sides as in our Case we suppose it) without any great Difficulty be concluded and determined by the Judgment of the Man they thus apply to; especially if that Judgment be seconded by the Suffrage of some other learned pious Men, whom they have thought fit upon this Occasion to consult likewise.

If now the Opinions of one or two *private* Men be of so much weight as to over-rule a *Doubt* about the Lawfulness of an Action, when the Reasons on both sides are
equal;

equal; is it not very hard if the joint Resolution and Determination of our *publick Governors*, whose Office and Business it is to consult and command for the best, should not in such a Case have the same Influence upon the Minds of their own *Subjects*? Or would it not argue much *Self-conceit* and *Arrogance*, and a very *mean Opinion* of our Superiors, and a great *Contempt* of their Authority, to refuse that respect to them which we give to every *private* Man almost that we think wiser than ourselves?

Secondly, I desire that may be taken notice of, which the *Casuits*, and in particular our excellent Bishop *Sanderſon*, have urged in this Affair, *viz.* It is a known Rule in Law, *That in all disputed Cases, he that is in Poſſeſſion of the Thing contended for, hath the Advantage of the other that contends with him, ſuppoſing all other Things be equal.* In controverted matters, the Right is always presumed to be on the Side of the *Poſſeſſor*, unless there be a good Reason shewn to the contrary.

Thus for Instance, If I be in Poſſeſſion of an *Eſtate* which another Man makes a Claim to, and it is equally doubtful whether that *Eſtate* belongs to him or me; yet so long as I have the Poſſeſſion of it, I have a good Title to it by the Laws of God and Man; nor can I without Injustice be disposed of it, till my Adversary hath made it appear that he hath a better Title to it than I.

Let us now apply this Rule to our present Case. Here is a Contest or Dispute between the *Superior* and the *Subject*, about the matter of *Right* as to a particular Action. The *Superior* saith, it is his *Right* to command his *Subject* in this Instance, and accordingly doth command him. The *Subject* saith, that he doubts whether his *Superior* hath *Right* to command him in this Instance, because he doubts whether this Command be not against the Law of GOD.

But in the mean time the Superior is in actual Possession of the Power and Authority to command, though it be uncertain and doubtful whether as to this Instance he do not exceed the just Limits of his Power.

Why, certainly by the former Rule, so long as the Case is thus doubtful, the Subject must yield; and at no hand by his Disobedience *dispossess* his Superior of that Authority he is possessed of, till he be convinced in his own Conscience that he hath greater reason to *disobey* in this Instance than to *obey*; which in our Case it is impossible he should have, because we here suppose that the Reasons on both Sides are equal.

But, *Thirdly*, If this Argument appear too subtle; let the Question before us be decided by the *common Rule*, viz. That in all *doubtful* Cases the *safer* Side is to be chosen,

Now

Now putting the Point upon this Issue, I ask which is *safest*, with respect to *Conscience*, for a Man to *obey* his Superiors in such a *purely doubtful* Case as we here speak of; or to *disobey* them? I think this Question will soon be answered by any Man that will attend to what I am going to represent, *viz.*

There is a *plain* Law of GOD, and acknowledged by us to be so, that *commands* us to *obey* our Superiors in all *lawful* Things: But as to the particular Case, about which we are now supposed to *doubt*, it is very *uncertain* and *questionable* to us (even after our best Endeavours to satisfy ourselves) whether there be any Law of GOD which *forbiddeth* that thing which our Superiors have enjoined us.

This now being so, we thus argue: If it should prove that our Superiors do in this Instance command an *Unlawful* Thing; yet the *Hazard* we run in *obeying* them is very small and inconsiderable, in Comparison with *that* we run in *disobeying* them, supposing it should indeed prove that they command nothing but what is *just* and *right*, and conducing to the *publick Good*.

For by doing the former, by *obeying* our Superiors, the only *Hazard* we run, is of transgressing some *unknown* Law of GOD; some Law which doth no way appear to

us; all that we can pronounce after our best Enquiry being no more than this, that it may be, there is such a Law, and it may be, there is not: And therefore we may reasonably presume, that if there should indeed be such a Law of God; it is either not of such Consequence that we in our Circumstances were bound to *know* it; or if it was, that we had no sufficient *means* to come to the *Knowledge* of it; in each of which Cases, as I said, a Man's *Ignorance* doth excuse the Violation of the Law.

But now, on the other Side, if, in such an Instance as this, we *disobey* Authority when it hath *peremptorily* laid its Commands upon us; we venture upon a much greater *Danger*. For in that Case we run the *Hazard* of transgressing a *plain* Law of God; a Law, of which no Man can or ought to be supposed ignorant; and withal, a Law it is of such *Importance* and *Consequence* to Mankind, that we may truly say, the very *Being*, as well as the *Happiness* of all Societies depend upon it.

Supposing now this to be a true Account of the *Hazard* we run in acting on one Side or the other in our present Question, I leave it to any indifferent Person to judge, whether it be not much safer in such Circumstances as we here speak of, to *obey* our Lawful Superiors
with

with a *doubting* Conscience, than to *disobey* them with a *doubting* Conscience.

Fourthly, If there yet remain any Dispute in this Matter, let, if you please, our Saviour's *Rule* determine it, *As ye would that Men should do unto you, even so do ye unto them.* We desire no more favour for our Superiors, than this eternal Law of *Equity* will oblige us to.

If a Man will but be so impartial, as to pass the same Judgment in the Cause of Authority when he is a *Subject*, as he doth in his own Cause when he is a *Superior*, we believe there would be presently an End of this Controversy.

For let Men talk as gravely as they please about the *Danger* of obeying the *publick* Laws with a *doubting* Conscience; yet I dare appeal to themselves, whether they would not think it very unreasonable for any Domestick of theirs, over whom they have lawful Authority, to live in Contradiction to the *private* Rules and Orders of their Family, upon a Pretence of *doubting* whether those Orders were lawful or no.

If a *Parent*, for Instance, should command his *Son* to sit *uncovered* before him; he would not take it for a good Answer from the young Man, to say, Sir, I am doubtful whether it be not unlawful to use any such Ceremonies to Men, and therefore

fore I pray excuse me, if I do not pay you that respect you require.

If a *Master* should order his *Servant* to provide a Dinner for him on the Lord's Day; and he should reply, I would do it, with all my Heart, but that I am in *doubt* whether it be not forbidden by God's Word to do any Work on the Sabbath. I am not indeed *persuaded* that it is forbidden, but in the mean Time I am not satisfied that it is lawful, and therefore till I be resolved in this Point, I pray, Sir, be pleased to pardon me.

Would now a *Parent* or a *Master* think these Answers reasonable? Would he take them in such good Part, as to think his *Son* or his *Servant* had done nothing but what they were bound to do in thus refusing to obey his Commands? No, I dare say he would not; but on the contrary would tell them, you are my *Son* or my *Servant*, and you must leave it to me to judge what is fit for *me* to command, and for *you* to do; I will take care to command you nothing but what is lawful and justifiable: But in the mean time, you must not think by your foolish *Doubts* and *Scruples* (so long as you confess you *know* nothing unlawful in what I bid you do) to controul my Orders and Commands; that I think neither becomes *you* to do, nor *me* to suffer.

I dare say most Men would judge this a very fitting and just Reply in such a Case. And if so, it is a strong Argument that we are all naturally apt to think that, in purely *doubtful* Cases, our Superior is to be obeyed notwithstanding our *Doubt*; and that if in any Case we think otherwise, it is where our own *Liberty* and *Interest* are concerned, and where consequently we may be justly presumed unequal Judges, as being prejudiced in Favour of ourselves.

Fifthly, Let me add this one Consideration more, and I have done. If in merely *doubtful* Cases, our Superiors have not a Power of determining us; what will their *Authority* signify? If it be not of Weight enough when the Scales hang even to turn the Balance, it is truly the lightest Thing in the World; indeed it is worth nothing; and there will not be left Power enough in those that are to govern us, for the securing in any tolerable Degree the Peace and Happiness of the Society they are to govern.

For I pray consider, What can there be so wisely commanded, or provided for, either in a *Family*, in a *City*, or in a *Kingdom*, but may be liable to Exception, and become a matter of *Doubt* to some Person or other?

There is nothing in the whole compass of *indifferent* Things (and such chiefly are the

the Matters of *human* Laws) but some Person or other will be found to *doubt* whether it be *fit* or *lawful*. And if such a *Doubt* be a just Reason to deny Obedience to the Law or the Command, in what a Condition are all *Families*, and *Corporations*, and *Societies* in the World? What will be the Consequence of such a Principle? Why certainly nothing but perpetual Jars, and Disturbances, and Confusions.

For Instance, if whenever a Prince declares War against his Enemies, it should be supposed lawful for any Subject to withdraw his Assistance from his Sovereign, in Case he *doubts* whether that War be a lawful War or no; in what a sad Case would that Prince or that Kingdom be, that is to be supported and protected upon these Terms? Every Man is hereby made a Judge of the Merits of a *War*; and tho' he be never so ignorant, never so unexperienced, never so unable to make a Judgment of these momentous Affairs of the Kingdom; yet if some Rumours or uncertain Stories have reached his Ears, that make him doubt whether this War was lawfully begun or no; why, he is upon this Principle warranted to deny not only his *personal* Service, but his *Contributions* towards the Charge of that War. But these *Consequences* are *intolerable*; and therefore the *Principle* from whence they flow, must needs be thought *intolerable* also.

3. Having

3. Having thus given the Reasons of our Assertion, I come now in the *third* Place to answer the Arguments that are brought on the other Side.

All the Arguments I have met with against the Doctrine we have been establishing, may be reduced to *three*; and of those three, the *first* I have prevented by my stating the Question; the *second* I have already answered in my Proofs of our Assertion; so that the *third* only remains to be spoken to. However I will name the *two first*.

The *first* Argument is drawn from the mischievous Consequences of our Doctrine. For, say they, If a Man should think himself obliged in every doubtful Case to be determined by the Command of his Superiors, it would be the ready Way to involve him oftentimes in most grievous Sins. As for Instance, if a Man should so *halt between two Opinions*, as to doubt whether *Jehovah* or *Baal* was the true GOD, as the *Israelites* sometimes did; and at the same Time (as it then happened among them) the chief Ruler should command, that *Baal* should be worshiped: Why now in this Case (say they) according to your way of *resolving Doubts*, the Man must be obliged to worship an *Idol*, and to renounce the true God.

This is the Argument. But it is no Argument against us: Because in the stating
of

of our Question, we have excluded all such *Doubts* out of it, as do proceed from a Man's *gross* and *criminal* Ignorance of his Duty (as it is apparent and notorious that the *Doubt* in this Instance doth.) On the contrary, we are as forward to acknowledge as they, that if any Man do an Action that is plainly contradictory to the Laws of God, it is not his *Ignorance*, and much less his *Doubtfulness*, that will excuse him, though he do it in Obedience to his Governors. So that though this Argument would fall heavy enough upon those that plead for an *absolute blind* Obedience to Authority in all Things *indiscriminately* (which no Man of the Church of *England* doth) yet it doth not at all touch us, who only assert, That where we doubt *equally*, whether an Action be lawful or no, and have used our best Endeavours to satisfy ourselves how the Law of God stands as to that Matter, there the Command of our Superiors is to over-rule our *Doubt*.

But farther, to shew what little Force there is in this Argument, which indeed hath made a great Deal of Noise; we will try whether it will not make as much against our Adversaries, if they will give *us* Leave to put the Case, as it seems to make against us, when they *put* the Case.

Let us suppose therefore, as before, that an *Israelite* was very *doubtful*, whether *Jehovah* or *Baal* was the true God: And let

let us suppose likewise (as we reasonably may) that the King of *Israel* made a Law, that all the *Temples* and *Altars* of *Baal* should be demolished, and that *Jehovah* only should be worshiped: What Advice now should they give to the *doubting* Man in this Case? Would they say, that he must comply with the King's Laws, and worship *Jehovah* only, while yet he is doubtful in his own Mind whether *Baal* be not the true God? Why, this is against their own Principle, and gives away the Cause to us. But will they then say, that while this *Doubt* remains, the Man must not obey Authority in worshiping *Jehovah* only, but he must either worship *Baal*, and not *Jehovah*, or both *Baal* and *Jehovah* together? Why, this is indeed agreeable to their Principle; but then I appeal to my Reader, whether, according to their Way of *resolving* of *Doubts*, a Man is not as necessarily engaged in *Idolatry*, and other grievous Sins, as he is by our Way.

So that you see this Argument concludes as strongly against them as against us. But in Truth it concludes nothing either one Way or other, but is wholly foreign to the Question; as I shewed in my stating of it, whither I refer the Reader.

The *Second* Argument is drawn from the Limitations which GOD himself hath put to the Obedience we are to pay to our

Governors; and it may be formed thus: God hath not commanded us to obey our Superiors *absolutely*, and in *all* Things, but only in all such Things as are not contrary to his Law: So that wherever we are *uncertain* whether the Commands of our Superior be *lawful* or no, we must at the same Time be as much *uncertain* whether we be bound to *obey*: And, if so, how can you say that it is any more our Duty to *obey* them, than to *disobey* them in a *doubtful* Case?

To this we answer, That tho' we acknowledge that no Man is bound to obey his Superiors any farther than they command *lawful* Things; yet, whenever it happens that they command such Things as we *equally doubt* whether they be *lawful* or no, there are so many weighty Reasons to be given why a Man should *obey* rather than *disobey* in that Case, as will persuade any wise and good Man to think it his Duty to *obey*. And for those Reasons I refer my Reader to the *five* Particulars I before insisted on.

The *third*, and indeed the principal Argument is drawn from the Words of St. Paul in the xivth of the *Romans*, and last Verse; *He that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of Faith; and whatsoever is not of Faith is Sin.* From whence they thus argue: If it was a Sin in those *Christians* that St. Paul speaks of, to eat any Food, tho' in itself *lawful* to be eaten, so long as they

they *doubted* whether it was *lawful* or no; then, by Parity of Reason, it must be a Sin to do any other Action, so long as we have a Doubt in our Minds concerning the Lawfulness of it; and if so, it is not the Magistrate's commanding that Action that will make it cease to be a Sin in us to do it.

This is the great Argument that is brought against our Point, and I shall give it a full and a just Discussion; because, in Truth, if we come clearly off from this Text of St. Paul, not only all that is said against *obeying Authority* with a *doubting Conscience* will fall to the Ground, but likewise most of the Difficulties which entangle and perplex the Case of a *doubting Conscience* in other Matters, will be in a great measure removed.

But before I enter upon a particular Discussion of this Text, with reference to our present Controversy, it will be needful to premise some general Account of it, for the sake of ordinary Readers; that so understanding beforehand the *Case* which the Apostle speaks to, and the Meaning of the *Expressions* he here useth, they may be the better able to go along with us.

First, therefore, I shall give an Account of the *Subject-matter* of St. Paul's Discourse in this Chapter. II. Of what is meant by *doubting* in this Text. III. What is meant by *eating not of Faith*. IV. What is meant by being *damned* or *condemned* for so doing.

First, As to the *Subject-matter* of *St. Paul's* Discourse in this *Chapter*, it is undoubtedly the Case of those *Jewish Christians* that were not so fully instructed in their *Christian Liberty*, but that they still believed all the *ceremonial* Laws of *Moses* concerning the *Observation of Days*, and *Difference of Meats*, to be still in Force, and to oblige their Conscience; or at least they mightily doubted whether they did or not: So that whereas other *Christians*, who were better instructed, made no Scruple of eating any kind of Food, tho' forbidden by the Law of *Moses*; these Men had great Reason to forbear such kind of Meats, because they were *persuaded*, or at least it appeared more *probable* to them than otherwise, that they were bound so to do.

That this was the Case of those that *St. Paul* here styles the *weak Christians*, appears from several Passages of this Chapter, nor, I think, is it much questioned by any. As for what is intimated in the second Verse, concerning their abstaining from *Flesh* altogether, and only eating *Herbs*; which would make one think that it was not purely their Respect to the Law of *Moses*, but some other Thing, which made them thus to put a *difference* between Meats, because by that Law they were no more tied from *Flesh* (excepting only *Swines Flesh* and a few other sorts) than they were from *Herbs*. *St. Chrysostome*

sofome hath well obviated this Difficulty, in the Account he gives of the Case of those *Christians*: “ There were (saith he) several
 “ of the believing *Jews*, who, taking them-
 “ selves to be obliged in Conscience by the
 “ Law of *Moses*, even after their Christiani-
 “ ty, did still retain the Observation of
 “ Meats, not daring wholly to throw off
 “ the Yoke of the Law: These now, lest
 “ they should be found out, and reproach-
 “ ed by the other *Christians* for thus abstain-
 “ ing from *Swines Flesh*, and the like, upon
 “ account of Conscience, chose to eat no
 “ *Flesh* at all, but to feed altogether upon
 “ *Herbs*, that so this way of living of theirs
 “ might pass rather for a Kind of *Fast*, or
 “ religious *Abstinence*, than for a legal Ob-
 “ servance. Thus St. *Chrysostome*: and to the same purpose *Theodore*t and *Theophylact*.

But if any one be not satisfied with this Account of that Business, but will farther contend, That St. *Paul* here doth not only speak to the Case of *Jewish Christians*, who were zealous for *Moses*’s Law, but also takes in the Case of some *Gentile Christians* at that Time, who (upon a *Pythagorean* Principle they might have entertained) were *averse* to the eating any Kind of *Flesh*, as thinking all such Food to be *unclean*; they may, notwithstanding what I have said, enjoy their own Opinion: For it is indifferent to our Controversy, whether the Persons, whose

is here spoken to, were *Jews* or *Gentiles*: Only thus much appears plainly, that the most of them were *Jewish Christians*, who, together with their *Christianity*, had a conscientious Regard to the Law of *Moses*.

Secondly, As for what is meant by [*Doubting*] in the Text, the Reader may be pleased to take Notice that the Word [*διακρίνω*] which we here translate [*He that Doubteth*] doth as properly signify to *distinguish*, or *make a Difference*, as to *doubt* or *hesitate*. And thus it is used both by prophane Writers, and in Holy Scripture; as particularly in the 22d Verse of St. *Jude's* Epistle, *And of some have Compassion, making a Difference*, [*διακρίνομεν*] the very Word in the Text.

Difference;

as it is frequently used in the New Testament: *Vide* Mat. XVI. 3. Acts XV. 9. 1 Cor. IV. 7. VI. 5. XI. 29. The Word [*διακρίνω*] is sometimes taken *actively*, and then it hath the same Signification with [*διακρίνω*] i. e. to *make a Difference*. As is plain not only in St. *Jude's* Text here quoted, but in St. *James*, Chap. II. 4. where our *English* Translation hath indeed very well rendered the *Apostle's* Sense thus, [*Are ye not partial?*] But if they had truly rendered his Words, they must have thus translated [*Do ye not make a Difference?*]

Again; sometimes it is taken *passively*, and then the Signification of it is this, *to be divided*, or *severed*, or *distinguished*. And when it is used in this Sense, it sometimes happens that the *English* Word [*Doubting*] doth conveniently enough express it; *Doubting* being indeed nothing else but a Man's being *divided* as to his own Mind. And accordingly in some Places our Translators have thus Englished it, tho' I believe in some of those, more proper Words might be found out to express its Sense. But tho' in a few Texts it be thus used in Scripture, yet I do not find that any prophane Author did ever use it in this Sense of *Doubting*. And therefore, unless there be evident Reason, I do not know why we should depart from the *natural* and *usual* Signification of the Word in the Text we are now upon.

Now

Now, considering the Apostle's Argument in this Chapter is the Case of the *Jewish Christians*, who were divided in their Persuasions about the *legal* Observations, some making a Difference between *clean* and *unclean* Meats, and such like Things, and others making none; it seems every whit as proper and natural, and more suitable to the Scope of the Place, to take the Word in this Sense in this Place, rather than in that other, according to which it is usually translated: So that the Text is thus to be rendered; *He that maketh a Difference between clean and unclean Meats, if he do eat any Thing which he judgeth to be unclean, he is damned or condemned for so doing, because he eateth not of Faith,*

And so probable is this rendring, that our *English* Translators took care to put it in the Margin of our Bibles; as may be seen by every one. Nor doth it want good Authority; for the *vulgar Latin* thus translates the Place; and not only so, but *Erasmus*, *Hentenius*, and generally all the *Latin* Expositors, if we may believe *Estius*, who yet himself interprets it the common way.

Indeed I doubt not but this is the true Version of this Word in this Text; however, I do not so much stand upon it, as to preclude any Man from the Liberty of taking the other, if he likes it better: For tho' this way of rendering doth better serve for our

Purpose (as quite putting an End to the Controversy) yet our Cause doth not so absolutely depend upon it, but that we may very well allow of the common Translation, as will appear hereafter.

Thirdly, As for the Word *Faith*, which is here used, let it be taken Notice of, that when in the Verse before the Text the Apostle speaks of *having Faith*; and in the Text, of *eating without Faith*, or *not of Faith*; and that, *whatsoever is not of Faith is Sin*: We are not to take *Faith* here in the large Sense, as it signifies a Belief in JESUS CHRIST, or an Assent to God's Revelations, particularly those of the Gospel, which is the usual Notion of Faith in the New Testament; but only for a Man's *Assent* to the *Goodness* or *Lawfulness* of any particular *Action* that he takes in hand.

So that to *have Faith* about an Action, is to be persuaded that that Action may be lawfully done in the present Circumstances, or at least not to be conscious of any Reason that should make it unlawful. And, on the other side, to do an Action *without Faith*, or *not of Faith*, as the Apostle here expresseth it, is to do an Action, of the *Lawfulness* of which we are no way satisfied, but, on the contrary, think we have good Reason to believe that it is an unlawful Action.

Fourthly, Whereas St. Paul saith, that *he that doubteth, or differenceth, is damned* or
con-

condemned, *if he eat*; we are to take Notice, that that Expression is not to be understood of the *Punishment* of his eating in the other World (which is that which in common Speech we call *Damnation*) but only of the *Guilt* of his eating as to his own *Conscience*. Indeed there is no Colour why our Translators should here use the Word *Damned*, since *Condemned* is the natural Word, whether we consider the Propriety of the *Greek* or the *English Language*. So that this is the Meaning of the Proposition; *He that doubteth* (with such a Doubt as is here spoken of) *and yet eateth*, such a Man is *condemned* for so doing. Condemned! how? Why, *condemned* of himself (as the Apostle had expressed it in the Verse before) *condemned* of his own *Conscience*; because, without Necessity, having free Power over his own Actions, he doth that which he apprehends to be sinful.

I dare say, the Reader will be satisfied of the Truth of our Interpretation as to both the last named Particulars, if he will carefully read the foregoing Verse together with the Text (as indeed they do but both make one compleat Sentence) and judge of one by the other.

St. *Paul* hath for a good While been addressing himself to the *stronger Christians*, in order to the persuading them so to use their Knowledge and their Christian Liberty,

Liberty, that they might edify the *weak* Brethren among them, but in no wise give Scandal to any of them. And thus he concludes his Advice in this Chapter:

Hast thou Faith? Have it to thyself before GOD. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth: But he that doubteth (or maketh a Difference) is condemned if he eat, because he eateth not of Faith; and whatsoever is not of Faith, is Sin.

I dare appeal to any indifferent Person, that hath read St. *Paul's* foregoing Discourse in this *Chapter*, whether the meaning of this whole Passage be not to this Effect.

Art thou so well instructed in thy Religion, as to be persuaded that the Gospel hath taken away all Difference of Meats, and that thou mayest lawfully eat of any Food that is set before thee? Why, it is very well for thee; but then, be content that thou art ~~thus~~ persuaded, and do not upon every Occasion make such an Ostentation of thy Faith in this matter, nor despise others that have it not, as to lay a Snare before thy weak and uninstructed Brethren, who are of another Persuasion, to sin against their Conscience by acting as thou dost. It is sufficient for thee that GOD seeth thy *Faith*, and that thou canst justify thy eating to thy own Conscience; for, I can assure thee,

thee, it is no small Happiness for a Man to be able to satisfy his own Conscience in that Action which he takes in hand.

[This is undoubtedly the Meaning of that Expression, *Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he approveth.* That is, it is a great Comfort to a Man that his Conscience doth not condemn him in that Action which he thinks fit to do. *In ea re quam agendum suscipit*, saith Grotius: *In eo quod agendum elegit*, saith Estius: *En ce qu'il veut faire*, saith the late excellent French Translation. And it is just the same Thing that St. John saith in other Words, 1 John iii. 21. *My Brethren, if our own Hearts (i. e. our Conscience) condemn us not, then have we Confidence towards God.*]

But then (as the *Apostle* goes on) as to those that are so uninstructed in the Nature of Christianity, as still to make a Difference between clean and unclean Meats; as it infinitely concerns *them* to have a Care what they do, so it concerns *thee* likewise to have a Care how thou layest a Stumbling-block before them; for, in what a Condition would any of them be, if, being tempted by thy insolent Carriage and unreasonable Example, he should thro' *Fear* or base *Compliance* venture to eat such Things as he judgeth to be *unclean*? Why, certainly he is both an ill and a miserable Man for so doing, because he is *condemned* of his own
Consci-

Conscience: For he eats, not only without being convinced of the Lawfulness of his eating, but presuming the contrary; and whatever is thus done against *Conscience*, must needs be a Sin. This I take to be the true Meaning of this whole Passage; for which, if need was, we might produce several Authorities, particularly that of *St. Chrysostome*, who gives much the same Account of it.

Having thus given an Account of the Text as it lies in the Chapter, and with Relation to the Business that *St. Paul* had there in hand; I now come to consider it with Reference to our present Controversy with the Dissenters, and to take off the Argument they bring from it against the Position we are now contending for.

Their Argument, as I said, is this:

St. Paul here affirms, That whosoever *doubteth* about the Lawfulness of any particular *Meat*, and while that Doubt remaineth eateth of that Meat, such a Man *sins*, and is *condemned* for so doing; because he *eateth not of Faith*. If now it be so in this particular Case, it must be so in all other *doubtful* Cases; and consequently in the Case of *obeying Authority*, where a Man *doubts* of the *Lawfulness* of the Thing enjoined: That is to say, whosoever, in any Case whatsoever, doth an Action, of the
Law-

Lawfulness of which he *doubts*, he *sins* and is *condemned* for so doing, *because* he acteth *not of Faith*.

This is the Argument fairly put, and I shall now endeavour as fairly to answer it.

And first of all I say, this Argument proceeds upon a false Ground; for it supposeth *St. Paul*, in this Text, to speak to the Case of a *purely doubting Conscience* (which is the Subject of our present Controversy) whereas it may be made to appear with good Evidence, that it is the Case of a *resolved Conscience* only that he here treats of: So that this Text is wholly misapplied by the Dissenters, and makes nothing at all to the Business. For tho' there be indeed in this Text a very severe Censure of all those that act against any kind of *Persuasion*, yet there is nothing here said that toucheth a Man's acting *doubtingly*, either one Way or other.

That this is true, appears from the Account I have before given of the *Subject-matter* of the Apostle's Discourse in this Chapter; which is, the Case of those *Christians* who were not barely *doubtful* and *wavering* in their own Minds, whether they might lawfully eat of such *Meats* as were then disputed; but were *persuaded* they ought not, as believing that the Law of *Moses*, which had declared them *unclean*,
was

was still in force; or else believing them to be *unclean* in themselves.

That this was indeed the Case here discuss'd, seems very clear from the second and fifth Verses of this Chapter, where the Apostle *states it*; and more particularly from the 14th Verse, where he gives a summary *Resolution* of it, and in my Judgment, the very same Resolution that he doth in the Text: *I know* (saith he) *and am persuaded, that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean.* So that it seems the Person, whose Case St. Paul speaks to, was not *uncertain* or *unresolved*, whether the Meats under deliberation were *clean* or *unclean*, but he was *persuaded* they were unclean; he *esteemed* them to be such, and he must of Necessity do so, so long as he believed the Law of *Moses* to be in Force; as by all that appears in this Chapter he did believe.

But some may say, If this was the Case, why then doth St. Paul use the Word *Doubting* in the Text? To *doubt* of the Unlawfulness of an Action, is quite another Thing than to be *persuaded* of the Unlawfulness of it.

I answer to this, I refer my Reader to the Account I have before given of the Word [*διακρινόμενος*] which may as properly be rendered, *He that maketh a Difference* between Meats, as *he that doubteth* about

about Meats. Now if this *Version* be admitted, the Ground of this Objection is quite taken away. And I see no Reason why it should not be admitted, since (as I said) it is as natural as the other, and withal, it makes the *Apostle's* Sense to run more coherent with what he had said before.

But farther: Let, if you please, the common Translation be retained; let the Text be interpreted of one that *doubteth*, and not of one that *maketh a Difference*: Yet still this will make nothing against what we have now said. For it is undeniably plain, that what St. *Paul* here calls *doubting*, is, in our Way of speaking, a Degree of *Persuasion*. My Meaning is this: The *doubting* which St. *Paul* here speaks of, is not that where a Man's Judgment is suspended upon account of the equal Probabilities on both sides of the Question, which is the proper Notion of *doubting*, and that which we are now concerned with; but he speaks of a *Doubt* strengthened with so many *Probabilities*, that it wanted but very little of a *Persuasion*; or to speak more properly, it was a real *Persuasion*, tho' with some mixture of *Doubtfulness* in it: That is to say, the Man had so strong Convictions of the *Unlawfulness* of eating on the one Hand, and so little Satisfaction about the *Lawfulness* of it on the other, that if he was not fully persuaded that it was a Sin to eat; yet it appeared by many

many Degrees more probable to him that it was a Sin, than that it was not.

That this now was the Case, is evident beyond all Exception, from the Words that follow: *He that doubteth* (saith the Text) *is condemned if he eat*; that is, *condemned of his own Conscience*, as I shewed before. Now, how could that be, if the Man was not in some Degree *persuaded* that his eating was unlawful? It is certain no Man can be farther *condemned of his own Conscience* for doing any Action, than he doth believe that Action to be *forbidden* by some Law of GOD: To say, therefore, that a Man is *condemned of his own Conscience* for *eating*, must of Necessity imply, that he doth believe his *eating* to be *Unlawful*; and if so, it is certain he doth more than simply *doubt* whether it be lawful or no.

Well, but doth not the Apostle say, in this very Chapter, *Let every one be fully persuaded in his own Mind*? What is the Meaning of that, but that every one should assure himself that the Action he takes in Hand is a lawful Action, or else he doth not act with a safe Conscience? And is not that the very same Thing that is here said, *He that doubteth is condemned if he eat, because he eateth not of Faith*, or with a full Persuasion? There is therefore good Reason why we should interpret
this

this *Text* in the proper Sense of *Doubting*; the *Apostle* himself directing us so to do by this Passage.

This is the most considerable Objection that can be made against our Way of expounding this *Text*; and probably it was with a Respect to that Passage, that so many Interpreters have translated it as they have done; but whether they had any just Reason so to do, is the Question: Or rather, I think, it will be no Question with any one who attends either to the Design, or the Words of the *Apostle* in that Passage.

The Passage is in the fifth *Verse* of this *Chapter*, where the *Apostle* is giving an Account of the State of the present Controversy. *One Man* (saith he) *esteemeth one Day above another, another Man esteemeth every Day alike: Let every Man be fully persuaded in his own Mind.* So we render it; but how truly, I shall now examine.

It cannot well be conceived by the coming in of these Words, that St. *Paul* had any such Thing in his Mind when he writ them, as we would now make them to express: It was certainly none of his Business in this Place to oblige the contending Parties to get *full Persuasions* in their several Ways, and then all would be right, for there was too much of that already amongst them: Neither was it his Meaning here to tell them, that if in any Case they acted with-

out a full *Persuasion* of the Lawfulness of the Action, they finned against Conscience; for besides, that this is certainly false, it was nothing at all to his Purpose.

But this was that which he designed in this Passage, to persuade both the contending Parties quietly to permit each other to enjoy their several *Opinions* and *Persuasions* (in those little Matters, which did no way concern their Duty) without *censuring* or *judging* one another.

This now is a Meaning that perfectly suits with all the other good Advice he gives them in this *Chapter*, and this Meaning he doth express in as apt Words as can be thought on: *One Man esteemeth one Day above another; another Man esteemeth every Day alike. Let every Man be filled with his own Mind: Or, satisfied with his own Persuasion.* The original Words are [*Ἐκαστὸν ἐν τῷ ἰδίῳ νοί* (or *τῷ ἰδίῳ νοί*, without the Preposition, as is read in some good Copies) *πλεροφροείσθω.*] Which, saith *Grotius*, is an *Hebrew* Way of Expression, and signifies no more than this, *Quisque fruatur sua Sententia*; Let every Man enjoy his own Opinion: Or, as the *vulgar Latin* most properly translates, *Unusquisque in suo sensu abundet; i. e.* Let every one abound in his own Sense: Or, lastly, as the Commentaries that go under the Name of *St. Ambrose*, *Unusquisque remittatur suis Consiliis*; Let
every

every one be left to his own Counsels. And to the same Sense also both *St. Chrysostome* and *Theodoret* do expound this Passage. This Interpretation, tho' it be very different from that in our *English Bible*, yet expresseth the Signification of the original Text as well as that; and withal, hath better Authority to recommend it: But that which we chiefly stand upon, is, that the Subject-matter and the Scope of the Apostle doth necessarily require this Interpretation.

For, in Truth, if this Passage be rendered the common Way, so as that it shall import, that every Man, in every Case, is to be *fully persuaded in his own Mind*, I do not know how the Precept here given, can be supposed to be either *reasonable* or *possible*. It is certainly no more in every Man's Power to be *satisfied* about all his *Doubts*, that it is to *believe* or *disbelieve* what he pleases. When there appears Reason of *doubting*, it is in vain to command a Man not to *doubt*. Nay, it is as much a Man's Duty to *doubt*, and to keep his Judgment in Suspence, when the Weight of *Probability* is on both Sides equal, as it is to *believe* or *disbelieve* upon clear Evidence: Or rather, in that Case, a Man cannot chuse but doubt: He cannot *reasonably*, nay, he cannot *possibly* do otherwise.

D d 2

I think,

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D d 2

I think,

A Discourse concerning

I think, by what hath been said, it doth plainly appear, that this Text of St. *Paul* we are upon [*viz. He that doubteth is condemned if he eat*] hath nothing to do with a *doubting* Conscience in our Sense, but only with a *resolved* one; and consequently, that the Argument which is brought from hence against our Assertion, is nothing at all to the Purpose, because it is grounded upon a false Exposition of the Text.

But tho' this is (as I think) the true Answer to this Argument, and the Answer indeed which I mainly stand upon; yet there is another Answer given to it by the Casuists; which, because it is the Answer that our learned Bishop *Sanderfon* thought fit to pitch upon, I ought not to pass it by without Mention, nor, if I can, without some Improvement.

I must confess, if we do admit this Answer, the *Authority* and *Obligation* of a *doubting* Conscience will be set higher than I do in this Discourse suppose it: But however, it may be a good Answer to the Dissenters, because it unties the Difficulty upon their own Principles. The Answer is this.

2. In the *second* Place, allowing that the Man whose Case St. *Paul* speaks to in this Text, was really a *doubting* Person, and not one that was *persuaded* (as we have hitherto supposed) yet it doth by
no

no Means follow, that, because this Man was guilty of *Sin*, and *condemned* for *eating* those *Meats*, of the *Lawfulness* of which he *doubted*; therefore a Man that *obeys* Authority in an Instance where he *doubts* of the *Lawfulness* of the Command, that such a Man *sins*, and is *condemned* for so doing; this, I say, doth not at all follow.

For there is a vast Disparity in the Cases, and to argue from one to the other, is to argue from a *Particular* to an *Universal*, or from *one* Particular to *another*, without Respect to the different Circumstances of each Case; which is against all the Rules of *Logic*.

If St. Paul had said [He that doubteth is damned if he act] there had been some Pretence for making his Sentence an *universal* Proposition, so as to extend to all *doubting* Men in all [Cases: But now only saying [He that doubteth is damned if he eat] it shews, that he only spoke to the *particular* Case that was before him; and that other Cases are no farther concerned in his Proposition, than as they do agree in *Circumstances* with the Case he there speaks to.

Now the Case the Apostle there treats of, and *that* which we are now concerned about, are so far from any Way agreeing in the main *Circumstances*, by which a Man is to measure the *Goodness* or the *Badness* of an Action, that there cannot

be two *doubtful* Cases put, that are more *different*, as I shall now shew.

If St. *Paul* do at all here speak to the Case of a *doubting* Man, he speaks of one that acted *doubtingly* in a Matter where it was in his own Power to act without a *Doubt*: That is, He was in such Circumstances, that he knew he might certainly, without Sin, refuse to eat those Meats, concerning which he doubted; for there was no Colour of Obligation upon him to eat them: But yet, in this Case, where he was perfectly at Liberty to let it alone, for the serving some evil unwarrantable Ends, he would not chuse that Side which was *safe*, and where he need fear no Sin, which was to *forbear*, but would chuse that Side that was *doubtful*; that is, would run a needless Hazard of transgressing some Law of God. It is of such a Man, and in such a Case as this, that St. *Paul* speaks, when he saith, *He that doubteth, is condemned if he eat*; supposing indeed that his Words are at all to be expounded in this Sense.

But now, because it is thus in this Case (and in all such-like, if you please) doth it therefore follow from these Words, that a Man that is in other Circumstances, that is not at Liberty to chuse his own Way, as not being at his own Disposal, but under the Direction and Government of Authority; that this Man *sins*, and is *condemned*, if he obey

obey the Orders of his Superiors, when he is doubtful of the Lawfulness of the Thing, in which he expresth his Obedience? No, by no means; for this Case hath a quite different Consideration.

In the former Case there was only *Danger* on *one Side*, and that was in *acting*; and the Man might *forbear* if he pleased, and that without any *Danger*: But in the other Case there is *Danger* on *both Sides*, and the Man runs at least as great a *Hazard* in *forbearing* the Action (nay, we say, a much greater) as if he should do it,

So that undeniably (unless we will make one Rule to serve for all Cases, tho' never so different, which is the absurdest Thing in the World) for any Thing that St. *Paul* hath here said to the contrary, this latter Man *may* not only without Sin do the Thing he doubts of, but is *bound* to do it: Whereas, if the other Man spoken of in the Text, should do the Action he *doubts* of, it might be a Sin in him.

But farther: That St. *Paul* meant not to extend his Proposition to all *doubtful* Cases, but only to such Cases as he here treats of, is pretty evident from the Reason that he gives, why he that *eateth* doubtingly *sins* in so doing, *viz. Because he eateth not of Faith.*

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He doth not say, *He that doubteth is condemned if he eat, because he eateth with a doubting Conscience.* If he had said so, I grant, the Reason of his Proposition would have reached all *doubting Men in all Cases*; but this is that which he saith, *He that doubteth is condemned if he eat, because he eateth not of Faith.*

So that if there be any *doubtful Cases*, wherein a Man may *act with Faith*, notwithstanding his *Doubt*, I hope it will be allowed, that those Cases are excepted out of St. Paul's Proposition.

Now, that there are such Cases; and, that our Case of *obeying Authority* is one of them, I thus prove:

Whosoever so acts, as that he is satisfied in his own Mind, that what he doth is according to his Duty in the present Circumstances; such a Man acts with *Faith* in reference to that Action. This is evident from the very Notion of *Faith*, as it is here spoken of, of which I have before given an Account.

But now it is very possible that a Man may have a *Doubt* concerning the Lawfulness of an Action, and yet be in such Circumstances, as that he shall be satisfied that is very *reasonable* and *agreeable* to his *Duty*; nay (as the Case may be) that he is really bound to do that Action, concerning which he thus doubts, rather than
not

not to do it; because the not doing that Action, all Things considered, appears to him more *dangerous*, or attended with worse *Consequences*.

This now being granted, it undeniably follows, that wherever a Man lights into these Circumstances, he is not a *Sinner*, even according to the strictest Sense of these Words, tho' he act with some Kind of Doubt, because he acts in *Faith*; that is, he is *resolved* in his own Conscience, that thus it behoveth him to act in the present Case; and, that it would be *unreasonable* or *sinful* to act otherwise.

So that let our Adversaries make the most of St. Paul's Words they can, it is a very *illogical* Inference to say, that whoever acts with a *Doubt* upon his Conscience, in any Case, is guilty of Sin; and much more is it so, to affirm it in our present Case of *obeying Authority*: For it is certain, that many Men are (and I believe all Men may be satisfied, that in a purely *doubtful* Case it is not only more *reasonable*, but their *Duty* to obey their Superiors.

Well; but it will be said, Do not we here talk Contradictions? Can a Man have *Faith* about an Action, that is, be *resolved* in his own Conscience that such an Action is to be done, or may *lawfully* be done, and yet *doubt* concerning it at the same Time?

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I answer; this is so far from being a Contradiction, that it is a Case that every Day happens, where a Man hath a *Doubt* on both Sides, as it is in the Instance before us. A Man hath often very great Doubts of the Lawfulness of this or the other Action, when he considers the Action in general; but yet when he comes to weigh the Circumstances he is in, and the Reasons he hath in those Circumstances for the doing the Action, he may be persuaded, that it is better for him to do the Action than to let it alone, notwithstanding all the Doubts he hath about it; That is, tho' he doubt of the Lawfulness of the Action itself, considered without his present Circumstances, yet, as it comes circumstantiated to him, he doth not doubt but it may be lawfully done by him. But of this I have spoke largely before, in my Explication of the Rule of a doubting Conscience.

But, is not all *doubting* contrary to *Faith*? I answer, No, it is not: For such Kind of *doubting* as we here speak of, doth, we see, very well consist with *Faith*. My Meaning is, it is not necessary in order to a Man's having *Faith* about an Action, that all his *Doubts* concerning that Action should be *destroyed*; it is abundantly sufficient that they be *over-balanced*.

That which I would say, is this: Wherever a Man hath such a Degree of *Persuasi-*

on touching any Action he is deliberating about, that he believes it more adviseable to a reasonable Man, all Things considered, to *do* that Action, than to forbear it; such a Man hath all the *Faith* that is needful to the doing that Action with a safe Conscience; tho' in the mean Time he may have such *Doubts* concerning that Action, as will perhaps be too hard for him to *resolve*, and will create him likewise some Trouble and Uneasiness in the doing of it: Tho' indeed, to speak properly, I think these ought not any longer to be called *Doubts*, after they are thus *over-ruled* or *over-balanced*, but rather go under the Name and Notion of pure *Scruples*, which the *Casuits* of all Persuasions do not only allow, but advise that a Man should act against.

In plain *English*, That Doubtfulness about an Action which St. *Paul* speaks of, and which he censures as a Sin, was such a *Doubtfulness* as, after the Action was done, rendered the Man *Self-condemned*; his Conscience could not but reproach him for doing as he did: But now, in our Case, the Man is not at all *Self-condemned*, because he hath the Testimony of his Conscience, that he hath acted according to the best of his Judgment and Discretion. Tho' he acts with a *Doubt*, yet he is satisfied he hath made

made the most *reasonable* Choice that he could in his Circumstances: And where-ever a Man doth so, he both acts in *Faith*, and without any Danger of Condemnation from his own Conscience.

So that after all the Bustle that is made about *doing* or *forbearing* an Action with a *doubting* Conscience, you see there is no great Intricacy in the Case, nor any Necessity of *sinning* on both Hands, always supposing a Man to be sincere and honest; for, if he be really so, he will always do that which he judges most according to his Duty, or, at least, that which he judges to be consistent with it; and wherever a Man doth thus, it is certain he acts with a safe Conscience, notwithstanding any *Doubt* he may have about the Action: Because more than the former a Man *cannot* do, and more than the latter he is not *bound* to do.

As for what Sins an *erroneous* Conscience may engage a Man in; or what troublesome Reflections a *melancholy* Imagination may occasion to him in these Cases; I am not to answer for them, they are of another Consideration.

IV. Having thus largely treated of the *Nature* of a *doubting* Conscience, and of the Rules by which a Man is to act, whenever it happens; and that, both when he

is left at his own *Liberty*, and when he is under the *Commands* of others: All that remains to be done, is to speak something about the *Authority* or *Obligation* of a *doubting Conscience*; which is our *fourth* and last general Head.

But, in Truth, the Discussion of this might very well be spared, after what I have said relating to this Argument in several Places of the foregoing Discourse, particularly under my last Head: However, I shall endeavour to give some Account of this Point, tho' I intend it a very short one, because indeed what I have to offer, is not so much any new Matter, as an Application of the Principles I have before laid down, to our present Purpose.

The Point in Question is, concerning the *Authority* of a *doubting Conscience*; or, whether a *doubting Conscience* doth bind at all, and how far.

In Answer to this, I say in general, it is certain that a *doubting Conscience* of itself lays no Obligation at all upon a Man any way: Indeed it is a Kind of Contradiction to suppose that it should.

For, I pray, what is the Notion of a *doubting Conscience*, but this, That a Man is uncertain or unresolved in his Mind, whether as to this particular Action he be *bound* or not *bound*? To suppose now, that a Man is obliged in Conscience either Way,
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by Virtue of this *Doubt*, is plainly to suppose that a Man takes himself to be *bound*, while yet at the same Time he is disputing with himself whether he be *bound* or no.

To speak this plainer if I can. Since Conscience, as I have often said, is nothing else but a Man's *Judgment concerning Actions, whether they be Duties, or Sins, or indifferent*: And since the Law of God *commanding* or *forbidding* Actions, or neither *commanding* or *forbidding* them, is the only Rule, by which a Man can judge what Actions are *Duties*, and what are *Sins*, and what are *indifferent*; it plainly follows that a Man cannot be bound in Conscience to *do* any Action, which it doth not appear to him that GOD's Law hath some Way or other *commanded*, and made a *Duty*; or to *forbear* any Action which he is not convinced in his Judgment GOD's Law hath somewhere or other *forbidden*, and so made a *Sin*. And therefore, since in a Case where a Man is purely *doubtful*, he cannot be supposed to have any such Convictions that the Law of GOD doth either *command* or *forbid* the Action doubted of (for if he had, he would no longer doubt) it follows likewise by undeniable Consequence, that a Man's Conscience is not *bound* on either Side of the Action, but he may either *do* it, or *forbear* it with a safe Conscience,

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So that if there be any Obligation at all upon a Man to act thus, rather than otherwise, in a doubtful Case, that Obligation must arise upon one of these two Accounts; *viz.* either there is some *Law* of GOD concerning a *doubting Conscience*, which hath tied a Man up to such precise Measures of acting; or, at least, a Man hath a *Persuasion* that there is some such Law of GOD.

Now I grant, That in both these Cases there doth a direct Obligation pass upon the Man's Conscience; but then it is to be remembered, that this Obligation doth not arise from the Man's being *doubtful* in his Conscience, but from his being *resolved* in his *Conscience*: That is to say, if there be really any such *Law* of GOD, it is the Obligation of a *right Conscience*: Or if there be not, but the Man only judges that there is, it is then the Obligation of an *erroneous Conscience*: But as for the Obligation of a *doubting Conscience*, there is no such Thing.

The great, therefore, or indeed the only Point that is to be enquired into, in order to the Resolution of our present Question, is this: Whether there be any Law of GOD which doth determine our Actions one Way or other, in the Case of a *Doubt*; and what that Law is?

Now, in answer to this Enquiry, I say, That it doth not appear that there is any express Law of GOD in Holy Scripture, that
hath

hath laid any Obligation upon us as to this Particular of a *doubting Conscience*, either one Way or other.

The only Texts that I know of, which are thought to make for this Purpose, are the two Passages in the 14th of the *Romans*, which I have before largely given an Account of; *viz.* that in the 5th Verse, *Let every Man be fully persuaded in his own Mind*; and that other in the last Verse, *He that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of Faith*. But now, I think, I have made it plain by several Arguments, that these Texts do not at all concern our present Case of a *doubting Conscience*, properly so called.

So that there being no express *Particular Law* of God in Scripture, about acting with a *doubting Conscience*, we seem to be left, as to that Affair, to the *general Laws* of God, as they are declared, whether by *Nature* or *Scripture*.

Now the most that any Man can be obliged to by the *general Laws* of God, whether *Natural* or *Revealed*, in the Case of a Doubt, is only these two Things: First, to use his Endeavour to get himself as well instructed in his Duty, as his Circumstances and Opportunities will allow him; and, Secondly, where he is at a Loss for Information in that Case, to act as reasonably as he can.

I do not say, that a Man in every doubtful Case that happens, is strictly *obliged* to thus much. But I say, it is impossible he should be obliged to more. Because indeed more than this he cannot do; and no Man can be obliged to more than is in his Power.

Wherever therefore a Man in a *doubtful* Case takes Care to observe these two Things, he acts with a *safe* Conscience, however he may act *doubtfully* in that Case.

Thus far, I think, we are clear beyond Exception. But it may be, some will not be satisfied with this Account of our Point, but will be putting a farther Question.

We have before laid down several *Rules* about a Man's acting in a *doubtful Case*, the Sum of all which comes to no more than what we have now said, *viz. That in every doubtful Case a Man is to act as reasonably as he can.* The Question now is, Whether a Man is *strictly* bound in Conscience always to follow this Rule? Or, which is to the same Effect, Whether a Man, in a Matter, concerning which he hath only a *pure Doubt*, may not without Sin indifferently chuse either Side of the Action, though yet perhaps one Side doth appear to him more *reasonable* or more *safe* than the other?

This Question is indeed more *curious* than *useful*. But however, since it properly falls under the Argument we are now treating

ing of, and tends somewhat to the clearing of it; I shall venture to say something to it. Only I declare before-hand, that I mean not in what I shall say, to assert any Thing *dogmatically*, but only to propose, in order to farther Examination: And withal, that whether that which we say, be true or false; it doth not at all affect the Merits of the main Cause we have undertaken.

That now which I have to say to this Question, is this: That though it be eternally *fit* and *natural*, and conducing to a Man's *Happiness* both in this World and the other, that he should in all Cases, and especially in *doubtful* Cases, govern his Actions by the best Reason that he hath (and certainly the *wiser* and the *better* any Man is, the more steadily will he pursue this Rule) yet, on the other hand, I dare not say, that a Man is strictly bound in Conscience so to do; so as that he is properly guilty of Sin if he do not.

My Reason is this; because there is no Law of God which doth oblige us in all Cases, to do that which is *best*: And if we be not bound to do always that which is *best*, we are not bound to do always that which is most *reasonable*; for certainly that which is *best*, is always most *reasonable*: And if we be not bound to do that which is most *reasonable*, much less are we bound to do that which is *safest*, because that
which

which is *safest*, is not always either *best* or most *reasonable*. And if there be no Law of God that doth oblige us to any of these Things; then it is certain that we do not *fin* if we act otherwise; for *where there is no Law, there is no Transgression*.

Now, That the first of these Principles is true, we have as good Proof as can be desired, *viz.* the Authority of St. Paul, who hath in the 7th of the *First* of the *Corinthians* thus determined: And if that be true, the other two must needs be so likewise, because they follow from it by unavoidable Consequence.

Taking now this for granted, I ask, what Law doth a Man transgress, that in a purely doubtful Case chuseth either Side indifferently, without Respect to what is *safest* or most *reasonable*: Always supposing that the Side he chuseth, be not in itself *evil* and *forbidden* by God. I say, according to these Principles he transgresseth no Law at all, and consequently cannot properly be said to *fin* at all.

If the Man be at all guilty, it is upon one of these Accounts; *viz.* either because he acteth against the *Dictate* of his *Conscience*, or because he acteth against the *Law* of God, in preferring that which is less *reasonable* and *safe*, before that which is more so.

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Now, Upon the former account he is not at all guilty, for his Conscience hath passed no *Dictate*, no *Verdict* in this Matter, and therefore he cannot be supposed to act against any such *Dictate* or *Verdict*. The Man is in such a State, that he either believes he may act as he doth, without Violation of his Duty ; or, at least he hath no Belief to the contrary; so that his *Conscience* doth not any Way condemn him.

And as for the other Thing, of his not chusing that Side of the doubtful Case, which appeared to him most *reasonable*; it is true, if there was any Law of God which obliged him to make such a Choice, he would be guilty of Sin if he chose otherwise. But now it doth not appear, that there is any such Law of God. Nay, so far from that, that it appears from *St. Paul*, that there is no such Law, but that every Man is left to his own Liberty in this matter ; always supposing that he take Care not to chuse, or do any Thing that he judgeth to be inconsistent with his Duty; which in our Case we do likewise suppose.

But then having said this, we must add farther : That though we here have concluded, that no Man, in a doubtful Case, properly so called, is strictly obliged by any Law of God, under the Penalty of *Sin*, to chuse one Side more than another, but may indifferently chuse either ;

Yet

Yet, in the *first* Place, Whoever doth believe, or is persuaded in his own Mind, either that he ought not at all to act against a *Doubt*, or that in every doubtful Case he is bound to follow the *safer* Side; such a Man, so long as he so believes, cannot without Sin act according to the Principles we have now laid down.

And, *secondly*, We are far from encouraging any Man to act thus hand over head in a doubtful Case; much less from commending him for so doing. For though we say, that, strictly speaking, a Man doth not sin, which Way soever he act in a purely doubtful Case; yet on the other hand, I think he is but in a low Dispensation as to *Virtue* and *Goodness*, that never looks farther into his Actions, nor takes more Care about them, than only that they be not directly *sinful*.

He that is heartily good, will with *St. Paul*, not only consider what Things are *lawful*, but what Things are *expedient* and do edify.

It will not ordinarily be sufficient to engage such a Man in an Action, to satisfy him, that he may do that Action, without transgressing any Law of GOD: But he will examine whether the *doing* or *forbearing* the Action doth more serve the Ends of *Virtue* and *Charity*. And according-

ly as that appears to him, so will he determine his Choice.

In a Word, the better and the more virtuous any Man is, the more delicate and tender Sense will he have, not only of that which the Law of God hath precisely made his Duty, and so in a proper Sense doth *oblige* his Conscience; but also of every Thing that is *reasonable* and *excellent*, and *praise-worthy*: So that it will really grate upon his Mind, to do many Things, which in strict Speaking cannot be accounted unlawful or forbidden.

And thus it is in our present Case. If we suppose a Man to be a devout Christian, and a sincere Lover of God, he will not be able to prevail with himself, in a Case where he *doubteth*, to chuse either Side indiscriminately (though if he should, I do not know, as I said before, what Law of God he transgresseth) but he will weigh and consider the Reasons on both Sides, and that which appears to him, after such Consideration, to be most reasonable, and conducing to God's Glory, and his own and the World's Good, that shall have the Preference.

To come to a Conclusion; the Sum of what I have now said, is this. As Conscience is the immediate *Guide* of our Actions; so the *Rule*, by which Conscience itself is to be guided, is the Law of God, and nothing else.

Though

Though therefore we cannot be safe in following our Conscience, where our Conscience is not guided by the Law of God (because, as I have often said, our false Judgment of Things doth not cancel our Obligation to act according to what the Laws of God require of us; unless we can justly plead unblameable Ignorance of those Laws) yet on the other Hand, wherever Conscience tells us, that we must *do* this Action, because the Law of God hath commanded it; we must *do* it, or we *sin*.

And again, wherever Conscience tells us, that we must *avoid* this Action, because the Law of God hath *forbidden* it, we must *forbear* that Action, or we *sin*.

But if Conscience cannot say, that this Action is *commanded* or *forbidden*; there we are not tied under the Penalty of *sinning*, either to *do* or to *forbear* that Action.

But yet if a Man's *Conscience* should thus suggest to him; though I cannot say directly that this Action is a *Duty*, or that it is a *Sin*, because I am at a Loss how the Law of God stands as to this Matter, and consequently, I cannot lay any direct Obligation upon you either Way; yet my Advice is, that you would chuse this Way, rather than the other: For this way, all Things considered, appears most *fit* and *reasonable* to be chosen; for there is more *Probability* that this is the right Way than the other;

or there is less *Harm*, though you should be mistaken, in going this Way than the other. Now in this Case, though a Man be not properly obliged, under the Guilt of *Sin*, to obey his Conscience, because Conscience doth not propose the Choice to him under that Condition; yet if he be a wise and a good Man, he will undoubtedly chuse that Side which Conscience, all Things considered, hath represented to him to be the most *fit* and *reasonable* to be chosen.

And thus much concerning our *fourth* and last general Head.

Thus I have largely discussed the Case of a *doubting Conscience* in general, and answered all the considerable Enquiries that can be made about it. I am not sensible that I have left any material Difficulty in this Argument untouched; though I am very sensible I have said a great deal more than needed, in order to the Resolution of that Case, for the Sake of which I undertook this Discourse. But I intended such a Discussion of this Argument, as would serve for all other Cases as well as that.

I do not know whether it be needful to make a particular Application of what I have said upon a doubting Conscience, to the Case of our present Dissenters. However, it will not be amiss, if I offer something towards it; if it be but to save the
the

the Reader, who is concerned in that Case, the Labour and Trouble of doing it.

The Case that I am to speak to, is briefly this: There are several Persons that are unsatisfied about the Lawfulness of our Communion, as it is established and enjoined; and that, upon several Accounts. Some perhaps doubt of the Lawfulness of all *Forms* of Prayer. Others about the Lawfulness of *our Form*. Others doubt about the Lawfulness of our *Ceremonies*, or our Way of administering the *Sacrament*: And others, it may be, about other Things. None of them can indeed say, that any of these Things do go against their Conscience, or that they believe the Use of them to be unlawful: For that is the Case of a *resolved* Conscience, with which we have nothing here to do: But they are *undetermined* and *uncertain* whether they be lawful or no; and so long as they continue under this Suspence of Judgment, they dare not join in our Worship; fearing they would sin against God if they should.

Now of those that thus doubt there may be two Sorts.

There are some perhaps that have only a *single Doubt* in this Matter; that is to say, they make a Doubt whether they may lawfully *join* with us, so long as those suspected Conditions are required of them: But they make no Doubt, but are very well satisfied,

tisfied, that they may lawfully *separate* from us.

Again, there are others that doubt on *both Sides*, as they have good Reason to do. That is, as they doubt on one hand, whether the Terms of our Communion be not *sinful*; so they doubt on the other hand, whether it be not *sinful* to separate upon account of those Terms.

Now of these likewise, there may be two Sorts.

Some perhaps are *equally* doubtful whether the Terms of our Communion be lawful or no.

Others doubt *unequally*; that is, are more inclined to believe that they are *sinful*, than that they are *lawful*.

That now which is to be enquired into, is; what is most reasonable and adviseable in Point of Conscience to be done in each of these Cases.

Now as to the first of these Cases, where a Man hath only a Doubt on *one Side*, and that is, Whether he may lawfully communicate with us; but he hath no Doubt that he may lawfully separate. To this I say *two Things*.

First, That the Man's doubting only on *one Side* in the Matter, doth not make it more safe for him to separate, than if he had doubted on *both Sides*. Because indeed if he must doubt at all, it is his Duty, he is bound
to

to *doubt* on *both* Sides; and he is guilty of gross and criminal Ignorance of the Laws of God, if he do not. And if so, then his doubting only on one Side, doth not alter the Case, but it must have the same Resolution, as if it was a *double Doubt* properly so called.

If it be said, that it is a constant Rule of a doubting Conscience, and we have allowed it as such; that in Cases where a Man hath only a Doubt on one Side of an Action, it is more safe to chuse that Side, on which he hath no Doubt, than that other, concerning which he doubts: I do readily grant it. But it is to be remembered, that that Rule is always intended, and doth only obtain in such Cases, where a Man may certainly without Danger of sinning *forbear* that Action, of the Lawfulness of which he doubts; though he cannot without Danger of *sinning*, do the Action, so long as he doubts about it. But now in our Case here, it is evident to all Men that are not wilfully blind, that as there may be a *Danger* of *sinning*, if a Man should conform with a doubting Conscience; so there is certainly a *Danger* of *sinning* (nay, and we say a much greater *Danger*) if a Man do not conform. So that that Rule hath here no Place at all.

The Truth is, our Case, if it be rightly put, is this. A Man is here supposed to reason thus with himself: "I am very well
" satisfied in my own Mind, and I make no
" Doubt

“ Doubt at all, that I may lawfully and
 “ without *Danger* of Sin, cut myself off
 “ from the Communion of the Church
 “ [which yet by his Christianity he is bound
 “ to maintain and preserve as far as he can]
 “ And I may likewise lawfully, and without
 “ Danger of sinning, live in a constant Diso-
 “ bedience and Refractoriness to all that Au-
 “ thority that God hath set over me [to
 “ which yet by as plain Laws as any are in
 “ Nature, or the Gospel, he is bound to be
 “ subject]. I say, I am *satisfied* in my own
 “ Mind, that I may lawfully do both
 “ these Things. But I am very *unsatisfied*
 “ and *doubtful*, whether in my present Cir-
 “ cumstances, it is not my *Duty* thus to do ;
 “ so as that I shall *sin* if I do not.”

What now would any prudent Man say
 to this Case? Why certainly he would say
 this? That he who can doubt after this
 Fashion, is either a very *ill* Man or a very
ignorant one. And that such a Man doth a
 great deal more stand in need of good *Ad-*
vice, and wholesome *Instructions* about the
 plain Duties of Christianity, than of *Rules*
 and *Directions* how to behave himself in
doubtful Cases. Because indeed the best
 Rules of that Kind are not to his Case, so
 long as he continues thus ignorant. And if
 he should observe them, yet that would not
 justify his acting, if it should indeed prove
 contrary to the Law of God, because it was
 both

both in his Power, and it was his Duty to know better. A Man's right proceeding according to the *Rules* of a *doubting Conscience*, in a Case where he is entangled by a wilfully *erroneous* one; will no more discharge him from *Sin*, as to his *Soul*, if he do an evil Action, than the *second* Concoction, though never so regular, can rectify the Errors of the *first* as to his Body.

But *Secondly*, though that which I have now offered, be the proper Answer to the Case before us; yet there is this farther to be said to it, *viz.* Though we should suppose that the Law of God had not obliged us to keep the Unity of the Church, or to obey our lawful Superiors; but had left it as an indifferent Matter, and that there was no *Danger* at all in *forbearing* these Things; but the only Danger was in *doing* them; so that the Doubt about Conformity, should have perfectly the Nature of a *single Doubt*, as it is put in the Case: I say, now even upon this Supposition it will bear a just Dispute, whether *Conformity* or *Non-conformity* be the more eligible Side: Nay, I say farther, that if the Rule I laid down about a *single Doubt* be true, it will appear, that as these Things now stand, it is more *reasonable* for a Man to *obey* the Laws, and *communicate* with the Church, so long as he hath only a bare *Doubt* about the Lawfulness of these Things, than to *disobey* and *separate*.

For

For thus I argue. Though in a *single* Doubt the Rule be, that a Man should chuse that Side of an Action, concerning which he hath *no Doubt*, rather than that, concerning which he *doubts*; yet, as was said before, that Rule is always to be understood with this *Proviso*, that all other Considerations in the Case be equal. If it should happen that a very great *Good* may be compassed, or a very great *Evil* may be avoided, by acting on the doubtful Side; that very Consideration hath Weight enough with a wise Man to turn the Balance on that Side; and to make that, which, abstractedly considered, was a *doubtful* Case, to be *clear* and *plain* when it comes clothed with such Circumstances. As I gave Instances in the Case of *Usury* and *Law-suits*. And twenty more might be added to them, if it was to any Purpose.

If this now be admitted for Truth, we have a plain Resolution of the Case before us, that is this. There are so many great Advantages both to the Kingdom, and to a Man's self, to be obtained by worshiping God in the Way of the Church; and likewise so many both *publick* and *private* Mischiefs and Inconveniencies that are consequent upon Separation; that if in any Case these Considerations have Weight enough to over-balance a simple Doubt about the Lawfulness of an Action, they will certainly have sufficient

ficient Weight in this Case. And that a Man who is not swayed by them, doth not act so reasonably as he might do.

For my Part, I should think it very foolishly done of any Man, that, so long as he is utterly uncertain whether he be in the right or the wrong (as every one that doubteth is) should be so confident of his Point, as to venture upon it no less a Stake than the *Peace* of the *Kingdom* where he lives, and the *Security* of the *Religion* established; and withal his own *Ease* and *Liberty*, and lastly, the *Fortunes* also of his Posterity. And yet such a wise Venture as this doth every one among us make, that upon the Account of a bare *Doubt* about the Lawfulness of the Things enjoined in our Communion, doth persist in Disobedience to the Government, and Separation from the Church.

I wish this was well considered by our Doubting Dissenters: They are wise enough as to the World in other Matters; it is to be desired that they would be as wise in this. And if they were, I dare say it would not at all prejudice their Wisdom as to the other World. It will be but little either to their Comfort or their Reputation at the long-run, to have it said of them; that besides the Disturbance they have all along occasioned to the publick *Peace* and *Unity*, they have also brought their *Estates* and *Families* into Danger of Ruin, by the just Prosecutions

secutions of Law they have drawn upon themselves; and all this for the Sake of a Cause they themselves must confess, they are altogether uncertain and unresolved about.

But this will appear much clearer, when we have set the *Doubt* about *Conformity* upon the right Foot; viz. considered it as a *double Doubt*, as indeed it is, in its own Nature: Which I come now to do.

In the *second Place*, there are other *Dissenters* who (as they have good Reason) do *doubt* on *both Sides* of this *Question*. As they doubt on one hand, whether it be not a *Sin* to conform to our Worship; because there are several Things in it which they suspect to be unlawful; so on the other hand, they doubt whether it be not their *Duty* to conform to it; because the Laws of the Church, and of the Land, do require them so to do. And of these, as I said, there are likewise *two Sorts*. Some perhaps are *equally* doubtful whether the Terms of our Communion are lawful or no, and consequently must doubt *equally* whether they be bound to conform or no. Others doubt *unequally*: That is to say, of the two, it appears more *probable* to them, that our Communion is sinful, than that it is a *Duty*.

Now as to the First of these Cases, the Answer is very short, and it is this.
 “ We have before proved by many Ar-
 I guments,

“ guments, that in a Case of a pure Doubt,
 “ about the Lawfulness of an Action where
 “ the *Probabilities* on both Sides are pretty
 “ *equal*: In that Case the Command of
 “ Authority doth always turn the Ballance
 “ on its own Side; so, as that it is not only,
 “ reasonable for the Man to do that in Obe-
 “ dience to Authority, of the Lawfulness
 “ of which he doubteth; but it is his Duty
 “ to do it; he sins if he do not. For this I
 refer my Reader to the *third* general Head
 of this Discourse.

The only Difficulty thereof is in the other
 Case, where the Doubt is *unequal*. And
 here the Case is this. As the Man appre-
 hends himself in Danger of sinning if he do
 not come to Church, and obey the Laws;
 so he apprehends himself in a *greater* Danger
 of sinning if he do: Because it doth appear
 more *probable* to him, that our Communion
 is *sinful*, than that it is a *Duty*: And a
 greater Probability, *cæteris paribus*, is al-
 ways to be chosen before a less.

But to this likewise we are ready provided
 of an Answer from the foregoing Discourse,
viz. “ That though it should be supposed,
 “ that in such a Case as this, where the Ba-
 “ lance is so far inclined one Way; the Au-
 “ thority of our Superiors alone will not
 “ have Weight enough to cast it on its own
 “ Side: Yet in this particular Case of
 “ Church Communion, there are so many

“ other Arguments to be drawn from the
 “ Consideration of the *greater Sin*, and the
 “ more *dreadful Consequences*, of disobey-
 “ ing the Laws than of obeying them ; as
 “ will, with any impartial conscientious Man
 “ out-weigh all the *Probabilities* on the
 “ other Side, so long as they are not so great
 “ as to create a *Persuasion*, and make it rea-
 “ sonable for him rather to *conform*, how
 “ strong soever his *Doubt* be about the
 “ Lawfulness of *Conformity* (so long as it is
 “ but a *Doubt*) than to continue in *Separa-*
 “ *tion*. *Vide* third Proposition about a
 “ *double Doubt*, pag. 404.

This is the Issue upon which we will try
 the Point before us, and I refuse no indifferent
 Man, that will but have the Patience to hear
 what we have to say, to be *Umpire* between
 us and our dissenting Brethren, as to this,
 Controversy.

In the first Place, let us suppose and ad-
 mit, that the Man who hath these Doubts
 and Suspicions about the Lawfulness of our
 Established Worship, doth really doubt on
 the true Side ; and that he would indeed be
 a Transgressor of the Law of God, if he
 should conform to it. But then it must be
 admitted likewise, that that Law of God
 which forbids these Things in Dispute, is
 wonderfully obscurely declared.

There are no direct Prohibitions, either
 in the Law of *Nature* or the Book of God
 about

about those Things that are now contested; so that the Unlawfulness of them is only to be concluded from Consequences.

And those Consequences likewise are so obscure, that the Catholick Church, from *Christ's* Time till our Reformation, was wholly ignorant of them. For though it doth appear, that either these, or the like Usages, have always been in the Church; yet it doth not appear, in all that Compass of Time, either that any particular Church ever condemned them as sinful: Or indeed, that any particular Christian did ever separate from the Church upon the Account of them.

And even at this Day, these Consequences by which they are proved unlawful, are not discovered by our Governors either in *Church or State*. No, nor by as learned and religious *Divines* of all Persuasions as any in the World.

The most *Divines*, by far the most; and those as pious and as able as any, are clearly of Opinion, that there is nothing *unlawful* in our Worship; but, that on the contrary, all Things therein prescribed are at least innocent, and free from Sin, if not pure and apostolical.

So that if it should at last prove, that they are all mistaken: Yet the Law of God, which forbids these Things, being so very obscure, and the Sense of it so hardly to be found out;

it is a great Presumption that a Man may very innocently and inculpably be ignorant of it. And if so, it will be a very little, or no Sin at all in him to act against it: Because if it was not his Duty to know this Law, it cannot be his Sin that his Practice is not according to it. And if it was his Duty to know it, yet it being so obscurely delivered, and only to be gathered by such remote Consequences; it can at most be but a *Sin of Ignorance*, in an ordinary Person, where so many of the best Guides are mistaken, if he should transgress it.

And then farther, this must likewise be considered; that if Conformity to our Liturgy and Worship should prove a Sin in any Instance; yet the evil Consequences of it extend no farther than the Man's Person that is guilty of it. There is no Damage ariseth either to the Christian Religion, or to the publick Interest of the Kingdom, by any Man's being a Conformist. But on the contrary, as Things stand with us, *Unity and Conformity* to the established Way, seem to bring a great Advantage to both (as I hinted before) and to be a probable Means to secure us from many Dangers, with which our reformed Religion, and the Peace of the Kingdom is threatned.

Well, but now on the other Hand, let us suppose the contrary Side of the Question to be true, *viz.* That our Governors in this
Matter

Matter are in the *right*, and we are in the *wrong*. That there is nothing required of us in the Church of *England*, as a Term of Communion, but what is very innocent and lawful; however it be our Misfortune to doubt that there is; and in a zealous Indulgence to these Doubts, we take the Liberty to live in open Disobedience to our lawful Governors, and break the Unity of the Church into which we were baptized.

I say, admitting the Thing to be thus; what Kind of *Sin* shall we be guilty of then? Why certainly we are guilty of no less a *Sin* than causelessly *dividing* the *Body of Christ*, against which we are so severely cautioned in the New Testament.

We are guilty of the Breach of as plain Laws as any are in the Bible, *viz.* Of all those that oblige us to *keep the Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace*; that command us to *obey those that are over us in the LORD*; *to be subject to the higher Powers*; *to submit to every Ordinance of Man for the LORD's Sake*; *to be subject not only for Wrath, but for Conscience Sake*. I say, these plain Laws we *disobey* for *Conscience Sake*; and we disobey them too in such Instances, where we have the whole Catholick Church of old, and far the greatest and the best Part of the present Church, of a different Persuasion from us.

Well,

Well, but as if this was not enough; What are the Consequences of this our Sin? (For by the Consequences of a Sin, the *Greatness* of it is always to be estimated, I speak as to the *material* Part of it, with which we are here concerned. Why, they are most terrible and dreadful, both with respect to ourselves and others.

By this unnatural Separation, we do, for any Thing we know, put ourselves out of the Communion of the Catholick Church; and consequently out of the Enjoyment of the ordinary Means of Salvation.

We maintain and keep up Divisions and Disorders in the Church, and lend a helping Hand to all those Animosities and Hatreds, all that bitter Contention and Strife, and Uncharitableness, which hath long torn the very Bowels of *Christ's* Church, and given occasion to that Deluge of Atheism, and Profaneness, and Impiety which hath over-spread the Face of it,

We put Affronts upon our lawful Governors, who should be in the Place of God to us. We give Scandal to all our Brethren that make a Conscience of living peaceably and piously. And lastly, as we offer a very fair Handle and Pretence to all discontented and factious Men to practise against the best of *Governments*; so we take a most effectual Course to ruin the best constituted *Church* in the World, and with it the reformed Religion in this Kingdom. This

This now being the Nature, and these being the Consequences of our *Separation* from the Established Church among us; I leave it to any indifferent Man to determine, whether any *Doubt* about the Lawfulness of our Communion, though that Doubt be backed with greater *Probabilities* than do appear on the other Side; nay, if you will, with all the *Probabilities* that can consist with the Nature of a Doubt, can have Weight enough to ballance against such a *Sin*, and such Consequences as Separation in our Case doth involve a Man in. I think there is no unconcerned Person but will pronounce, that supposing where there are Doubts on both Sides, a Man is to chuse that Side on which there is the least *Appearance* of *Sin*; he is in this Case certainly bound to chuse *Communion* with the Established Church, rather than *Separation* from it. And that is all I contend for.

But now, after all this is said; it must be acknowledged, that if there be any Man who hath other Apprehensions of these Matters, and that after a Consideration of all Things that are to be said for or against Conformity, it doth appear to him upon the whole Matter, both more *probable* that our Communion is sinful, than that it is a Duty; and withal, that to communicate with us, will involve him in a *greater Sin*, and in worse *Consequences*, than to continue

in Separation: I say, if any Man have so unfortunate an Understanding as to make such an Estimate of Things; we must acknowledge, that according to all the Rules of a Doubting Conscience, such a Man is rather to continue a Non-conformist, than to obey the Laws of the King and the Church. But then let him look to it; for his acting in this Case, according to the best Rules of a Doubting Conscience, will not (as I said before) at all acquit him either of the Guilt or Consequences of criminal Schisms and Disobedience: Supposing that indeed he is all along under a Mistake, as (we say) he certainly is; and that there is nothing required in our Communion, that he might not honestly and lawfully comply with, as there certainly is not. Unless in the mean Time, the Man fell into these Mistakes without any Fault of his; and God Almighty, who is the Judge of all Mens Hearts and Circumstances, doth know he had not Means and Opportunities to understand better.

The End of the Second VOLUME.

